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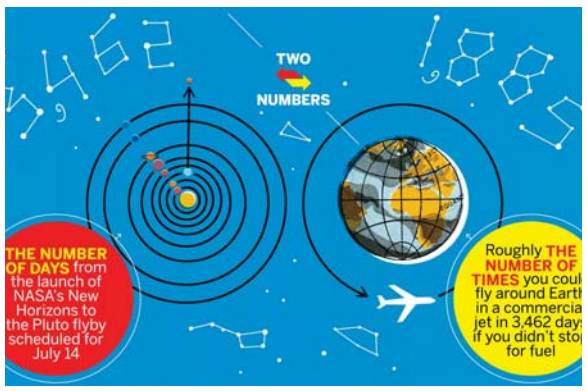
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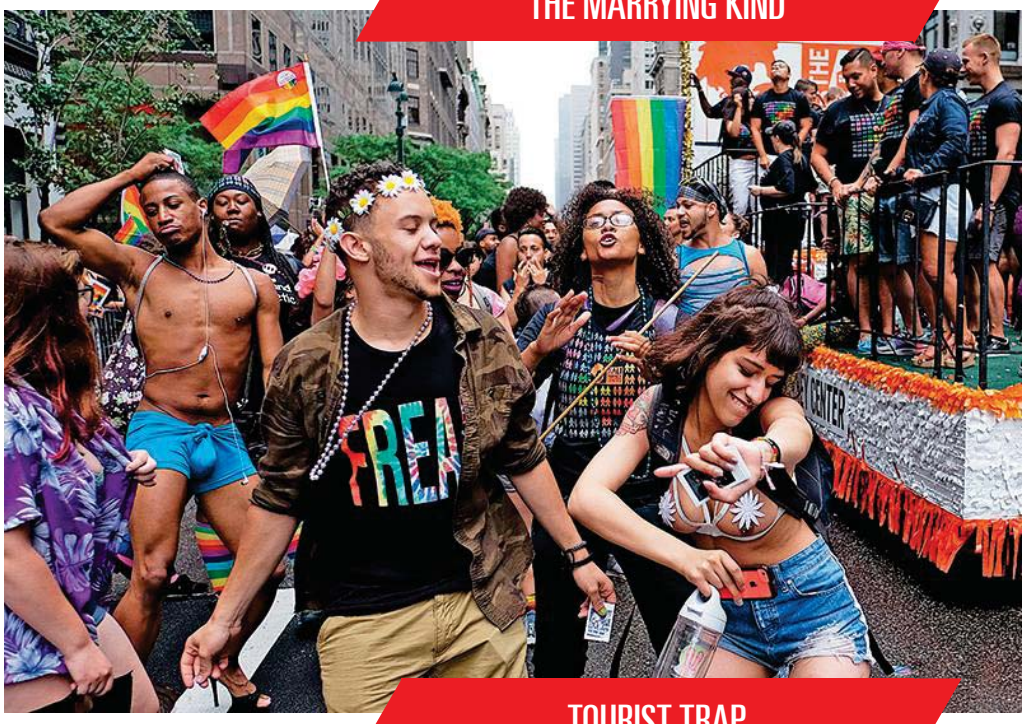
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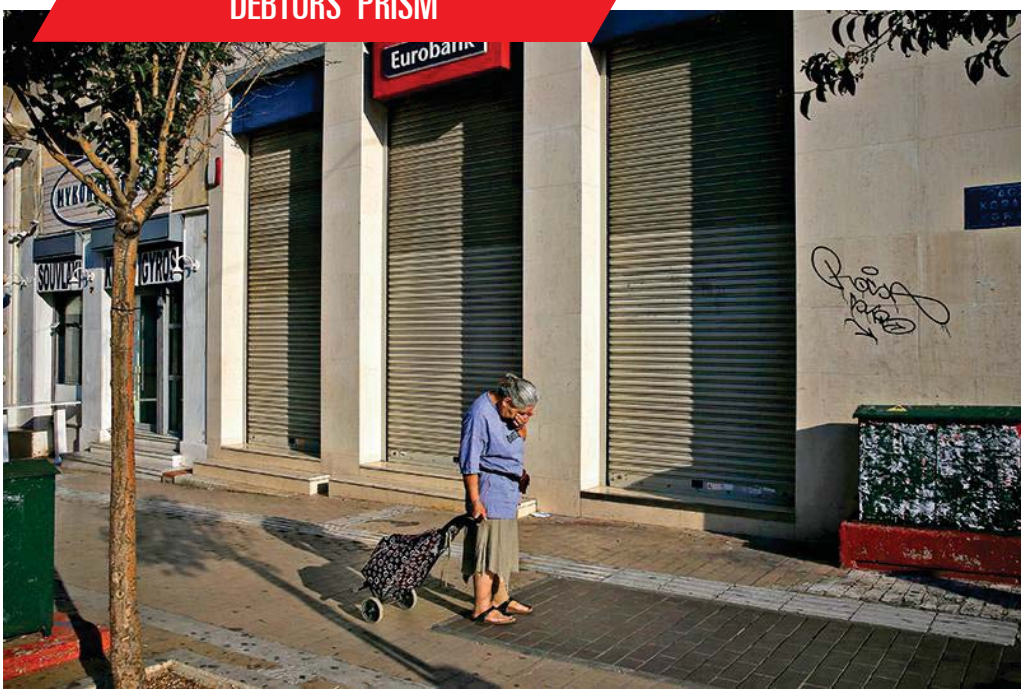
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THE MARRYING KIND



DEBTORS' PRISM



TOURIST TRAP





Shin Woong-jae/Redux

HOW CORPORATE AMERICA PROPELLED SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

BIG CORPORATIONS ARE TAKING THE LEAD ON SOCIAL ISSUES RANGING FROM GAY MARRIAGE TO THE CONFEDERATE FLAG.

A little less than four years ago, 70 businesses and professional organizations made a dramatic stand on one of the country's most divisive social issues. In November 2011, they signed on to a legal brief asking a U.S. appeals court in Massachusetts to overturn the Defense of Marriage

Act, the 1996 law that barred the federal government from recognizing gay marriages.

Getting the backing of major corporations, including Aetna, Google and Nike, wasn't easy. The lawyers who wrote the "friend of the court" brief "had to work hard to find the right people," says Susan Manning, an attorney with one of the firms that helped write that brief.



Crowds turn out on 5th Avenue in Manhattan for New York City's 2015 Gay Pride Parade NYC 2015, June 28, 2015, two days after the United States Supreme Court affirmed that same-sex marriage is a Constitutional right. In recent years, big corporations have been taking the lead on social issues ranging from gay marriage to the Confederate flag. Credit: Shin Woong-jae/ Redux

Contrast that with what happened this past spring, when Manning and her colleagues at Morgan Lewis, a law firm with a long list of corporate clients, set out to write a similar brief in Obergefell v. Hodges, the case the Supreme Court decided on June 26, which effectively legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. The day the court agreed to take that case, Manning says, she had business leaders calling her up and asking, "Are you guys going to do this? We want to be involved." She says 379 companies signed that

brief, including behemoths of retail (Wal-Mart), finance (JPMorgan Chase) and sports (the New England Patriots).

That's a sign of how quickly public sentiment has shifted on gay marriage, but it's also an indicator of how strongly many U.S. corporations feel compelled to weigh in on social issues, whether it is gay rights, the gender gap in pay or the fight over the Confederate flag. At a time when America's political class is catering to ever-narrower slices of the electorate, Fortune 500 corporations are trying to appeal to (or at least avoid offending) the widest possible swath of Americans. "Inclusiveness" may not be good politics in this day of polarization and micro-targeting, but it seems to be good business. And that is making the business community the sort of "big tent" political force that neither major political party can claim to be.

Related: Revolutionary (and Hypocritical?) Supreme Court Makes Gay Marriage Legal



Apple CEO Tim Cook has been vocal of his support for gay rights on Twitter and his company sponsored a team of walkers during Pride weekend parades in California. At a time when America's political class is catering to ever-narrower slices of the electorate, Fortune 500 corporations are trying to appeal to (or at least avoid offending) the widest possible swath of Americans. Credit: Robert Galbraith/Reuters

"We want everybody to shop at Wal-Mart," CEO Douglas McMillon told the Fox Business Network in late June, explaining why the retail giant was halting the sale of all Confederate flag merchandise. That was less than a week after a mass shooting during a Bible study gathering in Charleston, South Carolina's historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Wal-Mart's move was swiftly followed by other major American retailers, including Amazon, eBay and the venerable Sears, while CEOs Marc Benioff of Salesforce.com and Tim Cook of Apple echoed the anti-flag sentiment on Twitter. Apple has since moved to pull from its app store games that feature the flag.



Under Doug McMillon, president and CEO of Wal-Mart, the company has opposed a religious-freedom bill earlier this year and coaxed much of the retail industry into raising wages. In late June Wal-Mart took another stand when it said it would no longer sell Confederate flag merchandise.

Credit: Michael Nagle/Bloomberg/Getty

This is a significant shift for major companies, who used to duck for cover whenever these kinds of controversies kicked up. But expectations for corporate leadership have changed in recent years, and, as Benioff pointed out to Newsweek in a phone interview from Europe, social media make it far easier to weigh in on the topic du jour. Even a decade ago, “it was not as easy to get your message out,” he says. “Today, if I have my cellphone with me, I have the ability to communicate with millions of people at a time.” That’s the kind of social debate that once played out only on a local level. Back in 2000, for example, South Carolina’s Chamber of Commerce lobbied heavily for the state Legislature to remove the Confederate flag from the Capitol dome after the NAACP launched a tourism boycott. But it wasn’t until this June that corporate America rejected the flag en masse.

A religious freedom law enacted this spring in Indiana propelled corporations, in and out of state, to fight the measure because it seemed to sanction discrimination against gays. Local organizations, like the NCAA, headquartered in Indianapolis, feared a boycott. But the more compelling argument in the national business community was that the new law would have a negative impact on companies' large and diverse workforces, spread across states that have a range of marriage laws.



Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff was of the tech industries most vocal detractos against Indiana's Religious Freedom laws, arguing they were designed not to protect relgion but give people a license to discriminate.

Credit: Justin Sullivan/Getty

"I had no choice, as the largest tech employer inside Indiana," but to speak out, Benioff says. "My employees were...so rattled by what was going on." That echoes a central plank of the Supreme Court brief backing same-sex marriage nationwide, which declared, "Employers are better served by a uniform marriage rule that gives equal dignity to employee relationships."

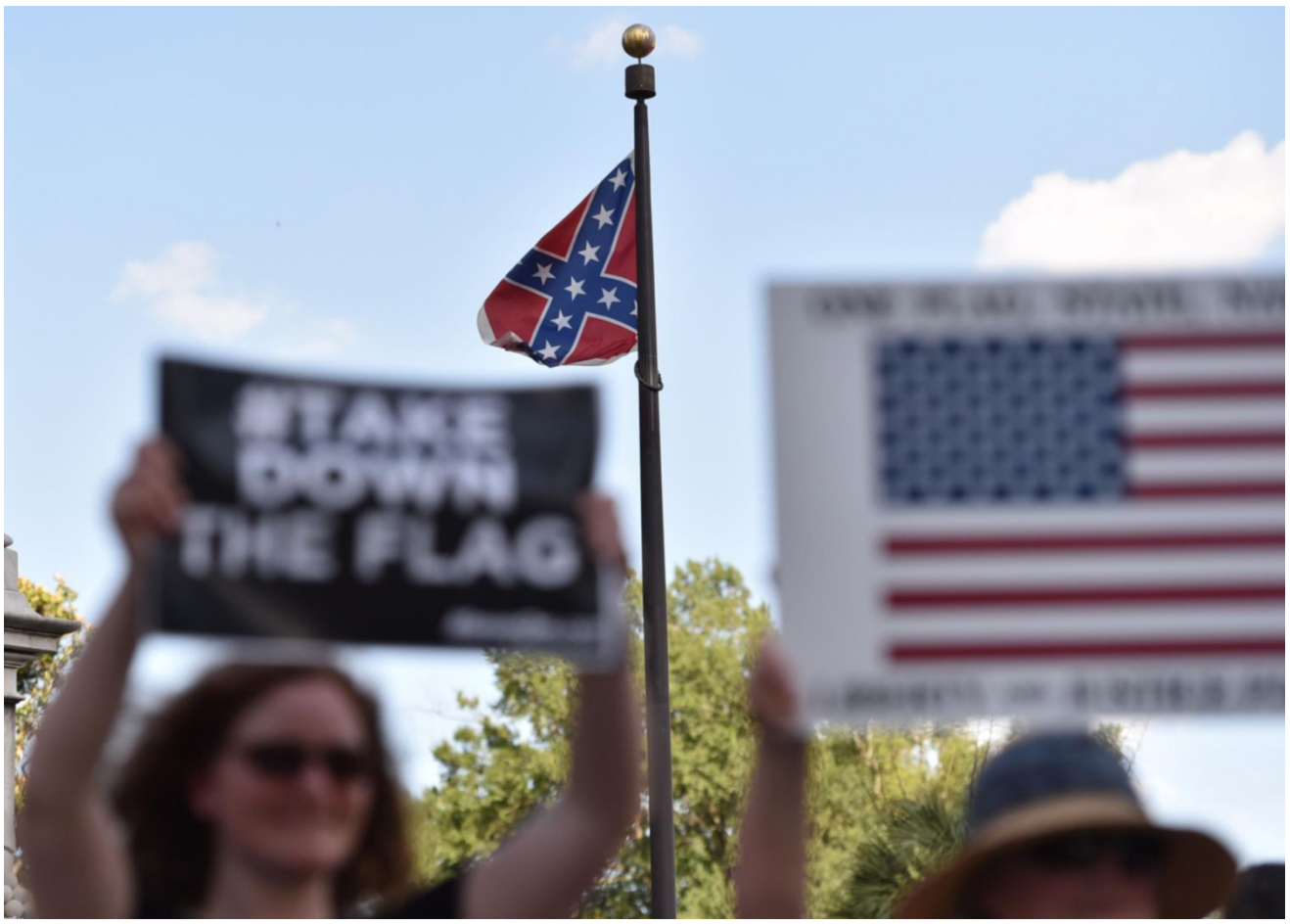
That's a far cry from the notion, popularized by University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman in the

1960s and ’70s, that “there is one and only one social responsibility of business—to...increase its profits.” That is what Benioff was taught in business school, but today, he says, “the business of business is improving the state of the world, and that includes the social issues that we’re discussing.”

Companies are now celebrated for thinking about something more meaningful than their bottom line—see Google’s “Don’t be evil” corporate slogan or Starbucks’s (not always successful) efforts to inject itself into the debate on gun control and race relations. Even old-school corporate giants like drugmaker Eli Lilly are stepping up; the Indianapolis company was a key player pushing Indiana lawmakers to change that state’s religious freedom law.

“There’s been a major transformation in thinking,” says Peter Madsen, a professor of ethics and social responsibility at Carnegie Mellon University. Now “corporations have stakeholders, not just shareholders.”

Those stakeholders include customers and employees —as well as anyone else affected by the actions of the company—a far broader array of people with more diverse backgrounds and values than simply the investor class. Big U.S. corporations like Apple and Wal-Mart are now trying to recruit and maintain massive workforces with all sorts of backgrounds, and serve a growing, changing population. As Wal-Mart’s McMillon puts it, “We want everybody to be comfortable coming into our stores, and we want our own associates to feel good about where they work.”



Two women hold posters against the Confederate flag during a protest rally in Columbia, South Carolina on June 20, 2015. The racially divisive Confederate battle flag flew at full-mast despite others flying at half-staff in South Carolina after the killing of nine black people in an historic African-American church in Charleston on June 17. "We want everybody to shop at Wal-Mart," CEO Douglas McMillon told the Fox Business Network in late June, explaining why the retail giant was halting the sale of all Confederate flag merchandise. Credit: Mladen Antonov/AFP/Getty

Political parties, by contrast, are narrow-casting, putting the bulk of their efforts into revving up their base while spending less time trying to persuade swing voters. Republicans focus on trying to energize reliable religious conservatives, while Democrats look to drive up turnout among minorities, single women and other segments of the party faithful.

When it comes to the partisan divide, big business has traditionally lined up with Republicans and their free-market principles. But as they try to keep pace with social currents, some CEOs are having very public splits with the GOP. As issues like gay rights hit a tipping point of public acceptance,

few corporations want to be caught on the wrong side of history.



After years of protest, one pictured here in Los Angeles, California, U.S., on Thursday, Aug. 29, 2013, McDonalds announced it would be raising the minimum wage it paid workers in select cities to above federal and state mandated minimum wages. Social norms are also starting to shape Fortune 500 companies' stance on policy issues that obviously do affect their bottom lines—things like labor and employment practices. Credit: Patrick T. Fallon/Bloomberg/Getty

Social norms are also starting to shape Fortune 500 companies' stance on policy issues that obviously do affect their bottom lines—things like labor and employment practices. In recent months, McDonald's, Target and Wal-Mart have announced they'll raise worker pay above the federal minimum wage, while other companies, such as Chipotle and Microsoft, are now promising paid leave. Executives say this is based purely on business calculations, but they have to be watching over their shoulder as cities and states around the country pass laws raising the minimum wage and mandating paid leave. Democrats have campaigned heavily on both issues in recent years, and these

are popular policies among voters. But the Republican-led Congress has resisted.

Even as those debates about labor become a focus of the 2016 presidential election, a few gay marriage skirmishes are bound to continue. As the Supreme Court's decision in Obergefell sinks in, there will no doubt be other states looking to pass religious freedom laws like Indiana's, which backers argue are necessary to allow business owners and private individuals to decline to participate in gay marriage ceremonies on religious grounds. Timothy Head, executive director of the conservative Faith & Freedom Coalition, vows to take on pro-gay-rights companies. Fighting corporate social activism, Head predicts, will become "a new front line, so to speak, in this national debate."



The crowd celebrates outside of the Supreme Court in Washington, Friday June 26, 2015, after the court declared that same-sex couples have a right to marry anywhere in the US. When it comes to the culture wars, the markets seem to have spoken. Credit: Jacquelyn Martin/AP

Manning is skeptical. She says she doesn't know of any "mainstream criticism or backlash…our clients have had as a result" of signing onto pro-gay marriage legal briefs. In fact, she says, these types of social stands have proved to be

good for business. Friedman himself was a great proponent of letting free markets work their will on society. When it comes to the culture wars, the markets seem to have spoken.



Robin Rombach/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

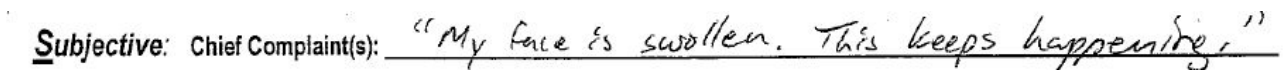
AMERICA'S POISONED PRISON

IS TOXIC DUST SICKENING INMATES IN COAL COUNTRY?

Marcus Santos entered Fayette State Correctional Institution a relatively healthy man; he had rarely been sick and had never had asthma or allergies. The only medication he took was a daily dose of Lisinopril, to curb his high blood pressure. Before being locked up in Fayette, a maximum-security prison in LaBelle, Pennsylvania, Santos lifted

weights every day and prided himself on his body and his muscles.

But soon after arriving at Fayette, he began to experience symptoms that suggested there was something seriously wrong. First, it was a nosebleed. Then headaches. Six months into his sentence, Santos was frail and in near-constant pain. At this point, his symptoms included severe, unexplainable welts and swelling all over his body. There were rashes and hives covering his armpits, his sides and the back of his neck. His feet, genitals and even his eyeballs all swelled at some point.



Credit: International Business Times

No one seemed to know what was wrong with Santos, now 41, who was serving a five- to 10-year sentence for selling cocaine. The doctors attacked his symptoms with a battery of allergy medications, but nothing worked. He began to feel desperate. Some nights, he'd stay up until 5 a.m., scrubbing his mattress with bleach, thinking bedbugs were biting him. He didn't sleep long enough to get nightmares. It was agony. Santos became a fixture in the prison's infirmary. Eventually, one of the doctors suggested his symptoms might be caused by an allergic reaction to something in the air, perhaps pollen.

But the source of Santos's problems was probably far more insidious. LaBelle is a rural town in the southwest foothills of Pennsylvania, near the border of West Virginia and Ohio. The prison sits on the banks of the Monongahela River, a tributary for barges hauling coal to steel mills in Pittsburgh. It's also adjacent to a massive coal ash dump site. For years, LaBelle residents, and more recently prison guards at Fayette, have complained that the site has been making them sick. In the winter, Santos had noticed something odd: a layer of black dust that settled on the white

snow. And so he began to wonder. Was coal ash in the air making him sick?



Marcus Santos shows off his arm tattoos, which read "Out of sight," and "Out of mind." Credit: Eric Markowitz

‘If You Make It…’

As the sun set over Western Pennsylvania on August 26, 2012, Santos felt his throat closing, cutting off oxygen to his lungs. He trudged over to the medical unit, where the male nurse on duty took his blood pressure. It was 166 over 102. The nurse then took his temperature, which was 98.8 degrees. The nurse then checked his breathing. “Lungs clear,” the nurse wrote in his notes. “Heart rate and rhythm normal.” Then she gave him two Tums tablets and told him, “If you make it, you make it.” (The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections [DOC] declined to comment for this story.)

“If you make it, you make it,” Santos repeated to himself, disgusted. He sat alone in his cell, thinking of his 12-year-old son, while waiting to see if he was going to live or die. Seconds turned to minutes. Minutes turned to hours.

Slowly, but surely, the swelling went down. Oxygen passed through his lungs. Santos could breathe.

“I’ve been shot at. I’ve been cut,” Santos told me recently. “I’m not no little preppie good guy. I’ve had my time on the streets. But when your body is turning against you because there’s something that’s out of your control, and you can’t do anything about it, it changes you.”

Fugitive Dust

When coal is extracted from the earth, it needs to be washed and processed. Until the mid-1990s, LaBelle operated one of the largest coal prep plants in the world. Years of washing coal created tons of waste, and by the mid-’90s, when its owners abandoned the site, LaBelle was home to a massive pile of this "slurry."

Untended piles of coal waste can pollute the local environment, so in 1996, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), along with a local company, Matt Canestrale Contracting (MCC), began dumping coal ash onto the site. This process—known as coal ash reclamation—is designed to stabilize the local ecosystem. On paper, it’s an innovative solution. Power plants around the country create tons of ash waste each year, and they need somewhere to dispose of it. Sites like the one in LaBelle are considered ideal because, theoretically, the dumped ash will solidify with the slurry, which prevents leaching, stops the spread of area pollution and makes the site generally more habitable. It’s win-win, in theory.

However, many are skeptical that the benefits of reclaiming the site outweigh the risks of dumping coal ash in a populated area. “Some of the substances in coal ash are the most toxic elements on the planet,” says Barbara Gottlieb, the environment and health director at Physicians for Social Responsibility. In 2010, Gottlieb wrote a report on the effects of exposure to coal ash, which concluded that “coal ash toxics have the potential to injure all of the major

organ systems, damage physical health and development, and even contribute to mortality."



Barges are loaded with coal at the Consol Energy Alicia Transshipment Facility on the Monongahela River before being transported down the river, outside Pittsburgh, Penn. on May 15, 2013. Credit: Ty Wright/ Bloomberg/Getty

Problems arise when the coal ash gets into the environment. For instance, if the site isn't properly lined with clay and a plastic tarp, Gottlieb says, coal ash can leach into streams, affecting local wildlife and potentially poisoning drinking water. And because the ash can be fine and powdery, it can blow off from trucks or barges if not covered properly. This is called "fugitive dust," and it's extremely dangerous.

Gottlieb says people can get sick from fugitive dust in several ways. The most obvious is through inhalation. But the dust can also be absorbed into skin, causing a variety of cancers, ulcers, hives and irritations.

Paul Wright, director of the Human Rights Defense Center (HRDC), estimates that dozens of U.S. prisons have been built near polluted sites in the past 15 years. However,

there’s very little reliable data on the subject, which is why Wright, working with Prison Ecology, a project that grew out of the HRDC, plans to map out all the U.S. prisons near toxic dump sites. In the meantime, Prison Ecology has begun a campaign to prevent the Federal Bureau of Prisons from building a prison on top of another former coal mine, in Letcher County, Kentucky.

Wright says there's one huge reason former coal towns welcome prisons: money. The declining coal industry has left scores of impoverished rural towns. That, coupled with the fact that the United States was opening a new prison every 15 days throughout the ’90s, created a toxic mix. Affluent towns almost never allow prisons near residents, but coal towns like LaBelle, where the per capita income is around $20,000, are much more accommodating.

October 1996
Matt Canestrale Contracting purchased the entire property at Labelle and signed an agreement with the Pennsylvania DEP to reclaim the site with coal ash.

February 9, 2000
Matt Canestrale Contracting sells a portion of the site back to the state of Pennsylvania.

October 2003
Fayette prison opens. Local newspaper promises 700 new jobs.

February 12, 2012
Marcus Santos enters Fayette prison.

June 26, 2013
Citizens Coal Council files a lawsuit against Matt Canestrale Contracting.

October 21, 2013
Eric Garland films an uncovered truck at the Matt Canestrale Contracting dump site.

September 2, 2014
Abolitionist Law Center, led by Dustin McDaniel, releases his report on SCI Fayette.

December 31, 2014
The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections releases its own report on cancer rates at SCI Fayette.

February 10, 2015
Abolitionist Law Center begins its second round of surveys to the prison.

In 2000, Pennsylvania was closing an inner-city prison in Pittsburgh, and the DOC was looking for real estate to build its next facility. It chose LaBelle, promising 700 new jobs for local residents but not mentioning the proximity to the coal ash dump site. “If you’re a glass is half-full kind of person, you’d say they’re repurposing the abandoned coal mine” and using it to create jobs, says Wright. “And if you're a glass is half-empty kind of person, you'd say it's pretty unconscionable that you’re putting people in cages at gunpoint and putting them in toxic waste sites.”

On a recent visit to LaBelle, I met with Jim and Candy Harvey. We sat on a wooden bench in front of the local firehouse. They recently moved out of LaBelle to another small town up the Monongahela River, but their grown children and three grandchildren live in their old home, in the center of town.



Jim and Candy Harvey, former residents of LaBelle, Penn., whose grandchildren live in the house they owned there and frequently fall ill due to what the family believes is environmental pollution. Credit: Eric Markowitz

Candy says her grandchildren are ill constantly. “I call them Typhoid Mary and Fred," she says, looking wistfully over the abandoned baseball field nearby. Jim says that

in the summer he'd see a black film settle on the surface of their aboveground pool. Residents have complained for years about pollution in the area, but nothing is done. "People feel that it's too daunting," he says. "How can we little people get going on this?"

On June 26, 2013, the Citizens Coal Council, a coal industry watchdog, filed a lawsuit against MCC, the company that owns and manages LaBelle's coal ash dump site. The lawsuit alleges that both the air and water had become polluted, and that MCC was liable because of the company's "failure to cover trucks hauling coal ash waste," which created fugitive dust. According to the complaint, water samples taken at the site in 2012 "revealed potentially harmful levels of antimony (0.26 mg/L); boron (4.31 mg/L); and lead (0.21 mg/L), all of which exceeded government standards." It also noted that the state DEP had issued notices of violation to MCC nine times, from 1999 to 2012.

However, the lawsuit does not make any claims about health effects, which are notoriously difficult to prove. And while the suit does bring up the fact that 50 families live in the LaBelle area, it does not mention that LaBelle is also home to a prison with more than 2,000 inmates, who are closer to the dump site than most of the houses in town.

William Gorton III, the attorney representing MCC, tells Newsweek, "There's been no evidence whatsoever about the health issues related to the people in LaBelle."



The coal ash dump in LaBelle, Pennsylvania, owned by Matt Canestrale Contracting, Inc., that sits adjacent to the Fayette Prison in which Marcus Santos was an inmate. Credit: Environmental Integrity Project

Jim and Candy Harvey don't buy it. They believe that everyone in the area is affected: residents, inmates and prison guards. In April 2015, the couple created an organization called Helping Organize to Protect our Environment, or HOPE, and invited LaBelle residents to attend a screening of a documentary about coal ash. They are also sending health surveys to residents.

A Bit 'Out-There'

On April 12, 2013, Marcus Santos was sitting in the prison common room, idly flipping through the TV channels when a program came on that caught his attention: a news segment about coal ash in LaBelle. One resident interviewed said he and his wife had battled cancer and showed the side of his home, blanketed in black dust, which he claimed tested positive for coal ash. Another couple interviewed for the show were on kidney dialysis.

After seeing that, Santos sent a letter to the Human Rights Coalition, an advocacy group that fights for civil

rights for prisoners. He described his symptoms, the proximity of the prison's location to the coal ash dump, and how many of his fellow inmates, as well as LaBelle residents and prison guards, seemed to be getting sick. "I understand that this letter may make me sound a bit 'out-there,'" Santos wrote. "But even a brief investigation will truly show what is going on in this area. And that this can NO LONGER be ignored or covered up."

After Dustin McDaniel, a young civil rights attorney in Pittsburgh who runs the Abolitionist Law Center, read the letter, he, along with folks from two other organizations, sent out 160 health surveys to inmates at Fayette. They got 75 back.

The responses shocked them. Eighty-one percent of the responding prisoners reported respiratory, throat and sinus conditions; 68 percent experienced gastrointestinal problems; 52 percent reported adverse skin conditions, including painful rashes, hives, cysts and abscesses; and 12 percent reported being diagnosed with a thyroid disorder. All of these numbers were significantly above what's considered normal.

McDaniel published his report online, and that finally pushed the DOC to launch its own study of health conditions at Fayette. On New Year's Eve 2014, the DOC published a report that focused on cancer rates in the prison and concluded that "there isn't an indication the environment contributes to the risk, and there are no environmental data demonstrating human exposures to significant levels of carcinogens."

Sitting in his home office under a portrait of Maximilien Robespierre, the French revolutionary, McDaniel gets visibly agitated when I bring up the DOC report, which he calls "their bullshit investigation." The problem, he says, is that the department looked only at cancer and ignored all of the other illnesses rampant in the prison.

“Health is a human right,” McDaniel wrote in his initial report, “and if the patterns that have emerged during our investigation are indicative of the harms and risks that accompany confinement at SCI Fayette, then it is imperative that the prison is shut down.”

Since September 2014, McDaniel has been filing dozens of right-to-know requests with the DOC about air quality in the prison. He’s also trying to expand the results of his initial survey. McDaniel has now sent every Fayette inmate a health survey. So far, he’s received about 500 responses, and he says the low response rate is due to the fact that many inmates fear retribution. At least five or six inmates have sent surveys to him indirectly, through relatives.

Trial Avoidance

On November 27, 2012, Santos, wearing a red jumpsuit and with shackles on his wrists and ankles, entered the office of Dr. David Skoner, an allergist at Allegheny Health Network, a hospital 40 miles north of the prison. He complained of facial rashes and swelling all over his body. Skoner pricked Santos’s forearms repeatedly, drew 13 vials of blood and ran several tests to determine allergies. He also recommended that Santos start taking the over-the-counter antihistamine Claritin, avoid soy and limit his exposure to dust mites.

The allergy tests came back negative.

Six weeks later, Santos was back in Skoner’s office. This time, the allergist was extremely concerned. The symptoms persisted, and he feared Santos’s conditions might be getting worse. They presented, he says, a “severe and new life-threatening problem that was unexplainable.”

Except there was one clue: Skoner says the symptoms were “very unique to this facility with his history. He didn't have this as a child. I figured there had to be some new dietary or environmental thing that was triggering it. But

there was nothing new in his diet. It was the same all the time. So the environment had to have changed."

On Santos's medical form, Skoner made his recommendation: "Cannot rule out triggering by unidentifiable water/air exposure in prison environment. Only way to prove is trial avoidance. I recommend three months' trial in another institution to further investigate causality." Santos was transferred to a state prison in Smithfield, Pennsylvania, about three hours northeast of LaBelle.



Marcus Santos poses for a portrait in Harrisburg, Penn. Credit: Eric Markowitz

'I Almost Drowned Myself'

Santos is dressed in black jeans, a gray Henley shirt and a black baseball hat when I meet him in May at Above Da Rim, a car shop in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He has a pencil-thin chin-strap beard that seems to trace the contours of his smile. "You hungry?" he asks. We hop in his car and drive over to his favorite Mexican restaurant, where he orders us steak burritos.

On the day of his transfer out of the Fayette prison, Santos says, he arrived in his new cell and began organizing

his things. He was thirsty, but when he looked over at the sink, he recalled the heartburn he would get from the Fayette prison water. But here in Smithfield, his inmates assured him, the water was fine.

Santos is an effusive guy, a good storyteller. Hunched over his burrito, he mimics drinking one cup of water. Then another. And one more. He pauses, looks me in the eye for a moment, then bursts out laughing. “Man!” he says. “I almost drowned myself in that water. It was so good. It felt so good.”

Santos says that after just six months at Smithfield, his symptoms started going away. Within a year, he was up to "95 percent." In March 2015, Santos was granted parole. He’s now at full health and is adjusting to life outside prison, spending time with his son and family and figuring out how to make phone calls on his new Samsung smartphone. "Phones got big again, man," he says with a wide grin. He even went on a date recently.

Santos keeps in touch with McDaniel. He’s happy the lawyer is investigating the prison, and he’s eagerly awaiting the results of the new survey. He knows the stakes are high. If the results indicate that prisoners at Fayette are getting sick at abnormally high rates, the DOC might be forced to launch a full epidemiological study of inmate health at the prison. And if the department finds conclusive evidence that inmates are getting sick from coal ash in the area, it may be forced to shut down the prison.

Santos didn’t want to talk about his role in this investigation, and he refuses to take credit for it. Mostly, he just wants to hear about the physician who got him out. “If it wasn’t for Dr. Skoner, I know I wouldn’t be having this conversation with you. There’s no way around it. I owe my life to that man."

Eric Markowitz is a senior writer with the International Business Times. Follow him on Twitter @EricMarkowitz.



Reuters

CHINA IS EAGER TO INVEST TRILLIONS ABROAD. IS THE WORLD READY?

AS ITS STOCKS SLUMP, BEIJING PLANS TO EASE RESTRICTIONS ON OVERSEAS INVESTMENTS. CAN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY WITHSTAND THE FLOOD?

Zhou Liangjun was pumped. For nearly a year, he watched as the Shanghai Stock Index soared. The young marketing executive had never trusted China's stock

market, but now something appeared to have changed. The government seemed to encourage investment in equities, particularly as the country's housing slump intensified. So early last month, he took half of his savings and plunked it into stocks on the Shanghai exchange.

His timing couldn't have been worse. Though China's market is still up 30 percent year-on-year, it's experienced a dramatic descent this summer. In 10 trading days ending on June 26, the market lost a fifth of its value. Two years ago, Zhou bought a flat and has seen its value decline modestly. Now the equity market is further eating into his net worth, leaving him shell-shocked and wondering what to do with what's left of his savings. "Maybe I should invest abroad," he says. Maybe I can buy a house in the U.S. Maybe I should buy stocks there, too. I don't know."

For Chinese citizens, and investors across the globe, that's the trillion-dollar question. Households in China have 8.8 trillion renminbi, the equivalent of $1.4 trillion, in savings. And once they start investing abroad, as Zhou is considering, the impact on global markets—everything from real estate to stocks and bonds—will be huge.

To a degree, it already is. Though the bulk of Chinese household savings is stuck in that country ($50,000 is officially the most a Chinese passport holder is allowed to send abroad each year), in practice, the situation is murky. Wealthy and even upper-middle-class Chinese have ways to ship money out of the country. There are middlemen, for example, who demand hefty fees—up to 20 percent—to help Chinese savers move money abroad.

Increasingly, people are willing to pay. Before the rout in the stock market began, China saw a slump in the domestic real estate market—by far the most favored investment for middle- and upper-class Chinese. Property and stocks are the most common ways Chinese tend to save, given that banks offer interest rates on savings that continue to linger around the inflation rate. Over a year ago, the government started

to support the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock markets—by allowing more trading on margin, among other things. But Chinese investors have also been looking to foreign property markets to stash their money, and the current market turmoil at home will only intensify that interest. According to the National Association of Realtors in the United States, the Chinese just became the largest foreign purchasers of residential property in the United States, accounting for 16 percent of all foreign purchases in the quarter ending March 31, compared with 14 percent purchased by Canadians, traditionally the top foreign investor in U.S. residential property.

Given the constraints on individuals moving money out of China, that's a remarkable development. And because China is gradually easing those restrictions, the dollar figures will likely increase. Beijing is preparing to launch a pilot program later this year that would allow individuals in six of the country's wealthiest cities to invest in stocks, bonds and property abroad. The program comes as the government is trying to crack down on the gray market that helps funnel individual wealth overseas. But the politics of going after individuals evading the $50,000 annual limit is tricky. For years, politically connected families—the rulers of the Communist party and their relatives, known as "princelings"—have been able to move money across borders with impunity. The rules that apply to ordinary Chinese haven't applied to them, and it's unclear if Beijing will continue to look the other way.

Further policy changes are also afoot. The chief of China's central bank, Zhou Xiaochuan, said the government's ultimate goal is to make the renminbi fully convertible. And in May, a researcher at the People's Bank of China wrote that the central bank aims to make that happen by the end of 2015. While the timing is still uncertain, David Wong, chief economist at Shui On Development Ltd., a big Shanghai-based property developer,

tells Newsweek he expects full capital account liberalization "in two years."

That's an ambitious timetable, and it carries risks. If domestic real estate stalls, at best, and the equity market gyrates, investing abroad will seem all the more enticing. With so much money in household savings, significant Chinese investment overseas could set off a financial exodus —one that could destabilize the country's own economy.

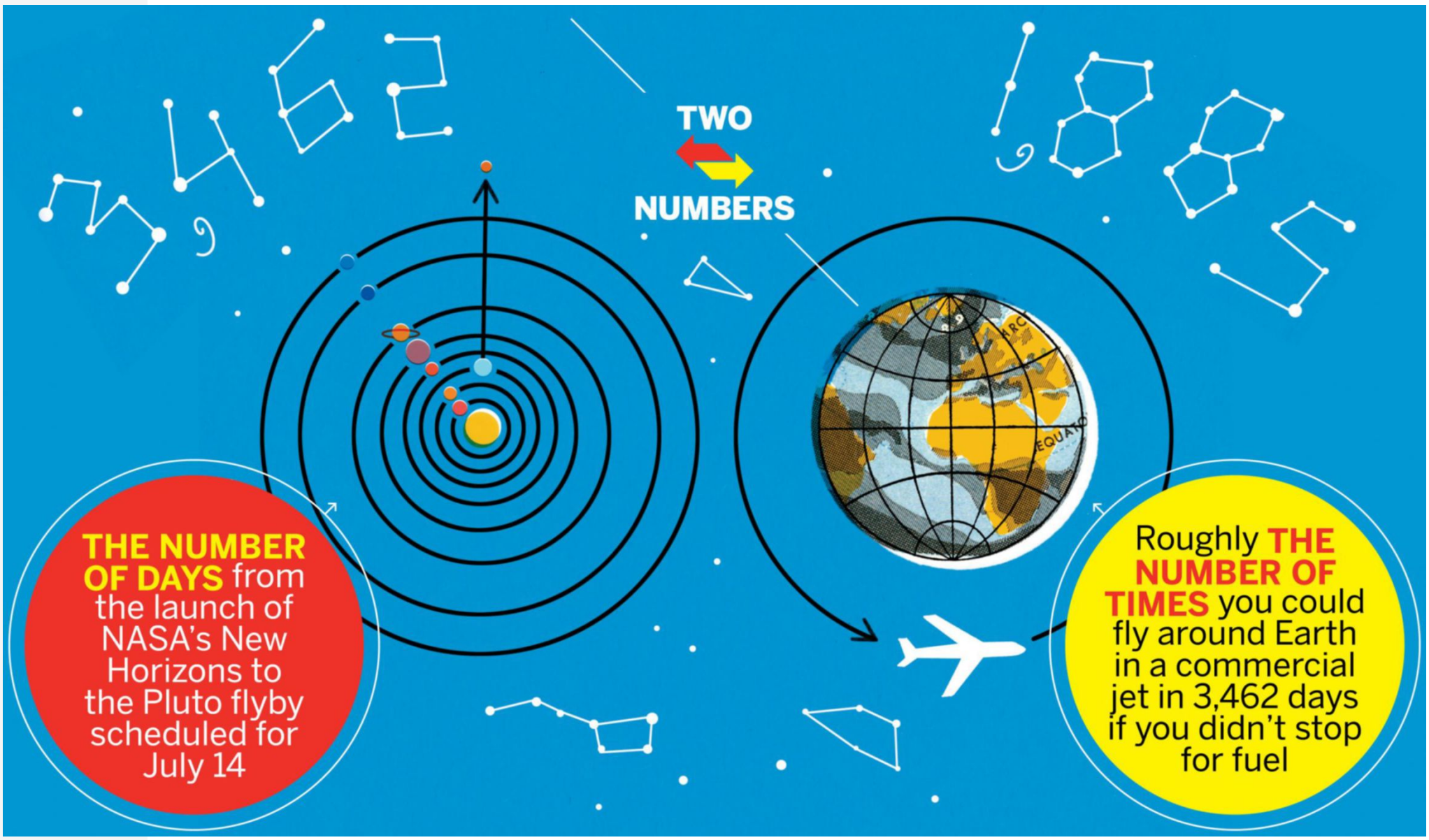
The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has issued warnings along those lines. It says the rapid liberalization of capital flow into and out of China could produce net outflow equal to as much as 15 percent of the country's GDP, or roughly $1.35 trillion. "We wouldn't advise doing this in one step," Markus Rodlauer, the IMF's China mission chief, told The Wall Street Journal earlier this year. We'd advise continuing with a gradual approach."

A massive number of households investing abroad is only one part of a potential surge of Chinese money moving overseas. Chinese companies—both state-owned and private —are more aggressively pursuing foreign investment projects, which have been dominated by energy and natural resource deals. That's about to change in a major way, as Chinese firms try to diversify their foreign holdings.

When middle-class individuals like Zhou bid for a house or an apartment in San Francisco, Sydney or London, few locals tend to get upset. Homeowners generally like it when the value of their properties rise. Yet a surge in Chinese corporate investment abroad will likely be controversial. In the 1990s, Japanese purchases of U.S. assets—from movie studios to high profile real estate—created a firestorm. Reciprocity—they can buy us, but we can't buy them—was a huge issue. It will be a far bigger issue as China gets into the same game, because entire sectors of Beijing's economy, dominated by state-owned companies, are off-limits to foreign investors. A recent report by the Rhodium Group, a New York–based consultancy, and Berlin's Mercator

Institute for China Studies says Chinese foreign direct investment is going to grow from $6.4 trillion in assets to $20 trillion by 2020. If that's true, it will likely elicit an unprecedented backlash across the globe.

If that happens, China will say it is simply taking the next logical step in its ongoing integration into the world economy. But the country's critics, whose numbers are growing, will say Beijing is intent on domination, not integration.



Justin Renteria

TWO NUMBERS: PLUTO GETS ITS FIRST CLOSE-UP

NASA'S NEW HORIZONS PROBE IS SCHEDULED TO MAKE ITS HISTORIC FLYBY PAST THE DWARF PLANET THIS SUMMER.

For those who grew up making Styrofoam models of our solar system with nine planets, Pluto's demotion to dwarf planet in the summer of 2006 came as a cruel blow. But earlier that year, on January 19, NASA launched its New Horizons probe on a path to make the first-ever flyby of

Pluto. At the time, the spacecraft, which is roughly the size of a baby grand, broke speed records, leaving the Earth's atmosphere at more than 10 miles per second, according to Jim Green, head of planetary science at NASA.

Despite how fast it was moving, New Horizons still had a long journey ahead. By the time it has its Pluto encounter—expected to be July 14, at 7:49 a.m. EDT—nearly nine and a half years will have elapsed, or 3,462 days. The distance it has traveled, more than 3 billion miles, is the farthest any space probe has ever had to go to reach its primary target.

"Just to get an idea how far Pluto is away," Green explains, if there was a road from Earth to Pluto and you drove a car on it nonstop at 100 mph, "it would take you 4,187 years." If you were to get on a Boeing 747-400 and start flying around the world repeatedly (at an average cruising speed of 565 mph at an altitude of 35,000 feet, and without needing to stop for fuel), you could make your way around about 1,885 times in the 3,462 days that New Horizons will have been on course.

"It's been a mission of delayed gratification," says Hal Weaver, who has been working as a project scientist on the mission since 2003.

"In a sense, it's completing our initial reconnaissance of the solar system, but also beginning a new phase in the exploration of this icy outer solar system," says Jonathan McDowell, an astrophysicist at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Pluto may be a "dwarf," but it's one of the largest objects in the Kuiper Belt, which begins near the orbit of Neptune and extends far into space. This outermost part of our solar system is composed of some of its most primitive material, and objects in it can give scientists clues about its formation, says Weaver. At the time of the flyby, Pluto will have an approximate temperature of minus 390 degrees Fahrenheit, he adds. "That's like keeping [it] in a cosmic refrigerator."

New Horizons has instruments that will map the composition of Pluto, take sophisticated measurements of its atmosphere and send back images in high definition and color. At its closest point, New Horizons will pass roughly 7,750 miles from Pluto's surface, Green says. If you were flying above New York City at that distance with New Horizons's imaging capabilities, Weaver says, you'd be able to make out Central Park's individual ponds.

We're at the "frontier of exploration of our solar system," Weaver says. July 14's historic flyby will "transform Pluto and [its largest moon] Charon from these pixelated blobs into real worlds with richness and complexity."



Ambassador of Israel to the United States Michael B. Oren speaks during an event to commemorate Holocaust victims and survivors in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington April 19, 2012. REUTERS/Benjamin Myers (UNITED STATES - Tags: POLITICS)

THE SOUND AND FURY OF MICHAEL OREN

THE ISRAELI DIPLOMAT'S NEW BOOK OFFERS A WINDOW INTO THE DEEP RIFTS BETWEEN ISRAELI AND AMERICAN JEWS.

In late June, Michael Oren, a celebrated Middle East historian turned Israeli diplomat, embarked on a nationwide U.S. tour to promote his new memoir, which recounts the four years he spent in Washington as the top envoy of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The

book was scheduled to be released this fall, but Oren says he pressured Random House to publish it now because "Israel is at a fateful juncture" due to the Iran nuclear talks and a French Middle East peace initiative making its way through the United Nations Security Council. Unlike other diplomatic memoirs, which tend to be bland, Oren's Ally: My Journey Across the American-Israeli Divide is provocative, as the American-born historian blames President Barack Obama for the sorry state of U.S.-Israel relations and most of what's wrong in the Middle East.

Oren says he hopes the book will "animate and inspire my readers" in advance of these challenges "to do more than just stand there." And undoubtedly, Netanyahu's American supporters will rally behind this cri de coeur. But others who closely follow U.S.-Israel relations may find the book self-aggrandizing and disappointing. In his memoir, the American-born Oren, who renounced his U.S. citizenship and now serves as a lawmaker in Netanyahu's right-wing coalition, transforms from a measured historian into a breathless polemicist. With its factual oversights, sneering tone and amateur psychological analysis of both Obama and Netanyahu's American Jewish critics, Ally tries to explain the deep rifts that have opened between Washington and Jerusalem, and between Israeli and American Jews.

The Columbia- and Princeton-educated Oren's first book was a best-selling history of the 1967 Middle East war in 2002. His second book, an ambitious account of America's centuries-long fascination with the Middle East, also became a best-seller. In his career as a Middle East scholar, Oren has held visiting professorships at Harvard, Yale and Georgetown. He has also used his intelligence, good looks and fine sense of irony to charm American audiences, from local synagogue congregations to the ladies on The View.

But the balance and objectivity Oren displays in his scholarly writing is absent from his memoir, as well as three

recent op-ed pieces that summarize the most provocative parts of his analysis. One, which ran in The Wall Street Journal under the headline How Obama Abandoned Israel, assesses the deep divide between Obama and Netanyahu and concludes: “While neither leader monopolized mistakes, only one leader made them deliberately,” referring to Obama.

Oren writes that Obama has doggedly pursued “an agenda of championing the Palestinian cause and achieving a nuclear accord with Iran,” at the cost of Israel’s security. He repeats familiar Israeli accusations of Palestinian perfidy and Iranian extremism to underscore what he views as Obama’s naivete. At the same time, he downplays any role Israel played in its recent flare-ups with the U.S.—such as announcing settlement expansion during a 2010 visit by Vice President Joe Biden or Netanyahu’s high-profile efforts to enlist Congress against Obama’s Iran diplomacy—as either accidental or principled.

Oren’s accusations have drawn heated denials from the Obama administration. State Department spokesman John Kirby rejected them as “false,” noting that Oren was too far removed from the real diplomatic action to know what was going on. Dan Shapiro, the U.S. ambassador to Israel, protested to Netanyahu, asking him to distance himself from Oren’s accusations. In yet another sign of how toxic relations are, Netanyahu refused.

Martin Indyk, who was deeply involved in U.S.-Israel contacts as Obama's special envoy to the Israel-Palestinian peace talks, says Oren was mostly out of the loop. “This goes to a lot of the things that are in his book. He relates something where he has partial knowledge,” Indyk, now vice president of the Brookings Institution, told CNN's Fareed Zakaria GPS on June 28. “The relationship needs to be repaired, not further damaged. And what Michael is doing is causing it further damage for no good purpose.”

Oren charges that Obama violated the two “sacrosanct” rules that have long defined the U.S.-Israel relationship: no public differences on policy that “common enemies” can exploit and no surprises by either government. As examples, he cites Obama’s 2009 criticism of Jewish settlements in the West Bank as an obstacle to peace and his demand that Netanyahu freeze settlement construction. He also claims the president “altered 40 years of U.S. policy” by endorsing Israel’s pre-1967 borders with land swaps as the basis for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal.

It’s true that past Israeli and American administrations have tried to keep their policy differences private. All governments prefer quiet diplomacy to public confrontations. But Obama is hardly the first U.S. president to openly disagree with Jerusalem on the issues of settlements and Israel’s borders. Ever since the 1967 war, when Israel occupied the West Bank, every U.S. administration has called for Israel’s withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines, with minor adjustments for security. These and other disagreements have regularly burst into public view since 1969, when President Richard Nixon’s administration first unveiled a peace plan that included the idea of adjusted 1967 borders. President Ronald Reagan’s 1982 peace plan included the same parameters. Both came as a surprise to Israel, which angrily rejected them. Other public disagreements include President Gerald Ford’s 1975 “reassessment” of relations in response to Israel’s unwillingness to make further concessions to Egypt in U.S.-brokered disengagement talks. “You don’t understand, I’m trying to save you,” Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the time. “You are making me, the secretary of state of the United States of America, wander around the Middle East like a Levantine rug merchant.… Are you out of your mind?” President George W. Bush regarded the West Bank as occupied territory and the settlements as illegal. The U.S. has also consistently refused to recognize Israel’s exclusive

claim over Jerusalem, a position recently underscored in a Supreme Court decision.

In ignoring these disputes, Oren also omits President Jimmy Carter's public spats with Prime Minister Menachem Begin over Israeli settlement expansion; Reagan's decision to withhold arms shipments from Israel after its 1981 bombing of Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor; Reagan's sale of surveillance aircraft to Saudi Arabia despite fierce Israeli opposition; and his decision to open talks with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which outraged then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. President George H.W. Bush clashed openly with Shamir over Israel's settlement policy, and there was considerable animosity between President Bill Clinton and Netanyahu during his first term as prime minister.

For a scholar of Oren's caliber, these omissions are disappointing. His tendency to dabble in armchair psychoanalysis is amateurish. In one of Ally's most controversial passages, Oren suggests Obama's major overtures to the Muslim world—from his 2009 Cairo speech in which he extended a hand to Iran, to his failed effort to reach an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord—were driven by a deep need to make up for how his Muslim father and stepfather abandoned him as a child. "Perhaps, too, his rejection by not one but two Muslim fathers informed his outreach to Islam," Oren writes.

With that observation, Oren both damages his credibility as a serious historian and offends some of Israel's strongest advocates. In a statement, Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said Oren's theorizing on Obama's relationship with the Muslim world "veers into the realm of conspiracy theories."

Oren also takes aim at American Jewish journalists, blaming them for Israel's poor image in the U.S. media. He singles out New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, as well as what he calls that paper's "malicious" editorial

page, which is edited by Andrew Rosenthal. He complains about The New Yorker editor David Remnick, Time columnist Joe Klein, The New York Review of Books and Leon Wieseltier, former literary editor of The New Republic, saying their antagonism toward Netanyahu resembles classic anti-Semitism. “The presence of so many Jews in print and on-screen rarely translates into support for Israel,” he writes. “The opposite is often the case, as some American Jewish journalists flag their Jewishness as a credential for criticizing Israel.”

Oren then plays the armchair shrink once more. In explaining why American Jewish journalists “nitpick” at Israel—a country he calls their “nation-state,” the former diplomat suggests some resent the country for complicating their identities as Jewish-Americans. Others, he sneers, “saw assailing Israel as a career enhancer—the equivalent of Jewish man bites Jewish dog—that saved several struggling pundits from obscurity.”

“I could not help questioning whether American Jews really felt as secure as they claimed. Perhaps persistent fears of anti-Semitism impelled them to distance themselves from Israel and its often controversial policies,” he writes, adding sarcastically: “Maybe that was why so many of them supported Obama, with his preference for soft power, his universalist White House seders, and aversion to tribes.”

In her review of Oren’s book, Jane Eisner, editor-in-chief of The Forward, a national Jewish newspaper, notes that fears of anti-Semitism, now at historic lows in the United States, are not what make many American Jews distance themselves from Israel. They are “far more likely to question the controversial policies Oren cites and reject Netanyahu’s persistent warnings that it’s 1939 all over again,” she writes. “For many Jews who came of age since 1967, Israel is seen not as David but Goliath; not as victim but as occupier. That same generation’s experience of American military engagements—Iraq and Afghanistan—has understandably

persuaded them that the ‘soft power’ Oren derides is far preferable to pursue than the reckless wars championed by George W. Bush and his contemporary acolytes.”

Oren was chosen as Israel’s ambassador to the U.S. largely because of his roots and his understanding of American culture. But as he travels across the states promoting Ally, he will likely learn he doesn’t know his former country as well as he thought.



Ints Kalnins/Reuters

AS RUSSIA MAKES MOVES IN THE ARCTIC, SOME FINNS FEAR A RED ARMY FROM WITHIN

SOME WORRY ABOUT THOSE RUSSIANS IN FINLAND'S MILITARY AS MOSCOW'S INCURSIONS PROGRESS.

Like most of his friends in Finland, Vadim works, likes heavy metal and has completed his military service.

What sets him apart from most of his peers, however, is his citizenship status: He's both Russian and Finnish. Since Finland passed a law permitting dual citizenship 12 years ago, more than 24,000 Russians have acquired Finnish passports and kept their Russian ones. Hundreds are required to serve in both militaries, but these days, few want to talk about it. (Vadim, like others interviewed for this story, asked me not to use his real name.) In recent years, some Finnish lawmakers and military officials have grown wary of dual citizens serving in the military. And the country's citizenship law, once popular, has become controversial.

"We thought that granting citizenship was an easy step," says Markku Kivinen, a professor of sociology and director of the Finnish Centre for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Helsinki. "But it's not."

Under ordinary circumstances, the presence of Finnish-Russians in the military wouldn't be a national security concern. The U.S. Army, for instance, relies on many immigrants to fill its ranks. But these are tense times for Baltic Sea nations. Over the past few years, Moscow has aggressively increased its military presence in the region. Latvia, for example, has seen more than 50 Russian near-incursions into its airspace this year, along with roughly 20 approaches by naval vessels, including submarines. Last year, five Russian military planes crossed into Finnish airspace, compared with only one in 2004. And earlier this year, Sweden's domestic intelligence agency, Säpo, warned that Russian military intelligence has been trying to recruit agents and is "interested in" the Swedish police and military.

This isn't Finland's first experience with Russian incursions. After defeating Sweden in 1809, Moscow ruled modern-day Finland for 108 years. Sinebrychoff, Finland's leading brewery, was founded by two Russian brothers three centuries ago. And former Finnish President Carl Gustaf Mannerheim, an ethnic Swede considered by many to be

the country's foremost war hero, once served in the Russian army too.

Over the past decade, however, Russian immigration has increased dramatically in Finland as newcomers have come looking for a better life. Each year, some 2,000 Russians choose to settle in the country, and about the same number become Finnish citizens. The influx makes Russians Finland's second-largest immigrant group, behind Estonians but ahead of Swedes.

Until recently, most Finns viewed Russian immigration as a good thing, especially since many of those crossing the border were doctors and other high-earning professionals. Two years ago, Finnish decision makers were even considering dropping the country's visa requirement for Russians. But as Moscow's military has made increasingly aggressive incursions, and more low-income Russians have crossed the border, the situation has changed. Last summer, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö said the current situation warrants a closer look at Finland's dual-citizenship rules. And former Interior Minister Päivi Räsänen has voiced concerns about Russian plans to keep an eye on its citizens abroad.

"The question we're facing is also what happens to the second generation, the teenagers growing up in Finland," says Kivinen. "Russian immigrants face big challenges on the labor market and feel humiliated by their experience here."

A young immigrant struggling to find a better life—or watching his parents do so—doesn't necessarily become a disloyal citizen. And many Finns seem to understand that. Julia Tamminen, who's lived in Finland since 1999, says she's had only positive experiences in her adopted country. "I've never encountered any mistrust or discrimination towards me as a Russian citizen. Quite the opposite. People have always been very nice to me."

Likewise, one young Finnish officer and recent conscript (who was reluctant to be quoted by name) expresses confidence in the allegiance of Russian-Finnish soldiers. “Our dual citizens have lived here for a long time,” he says. “Some of the dual citizens I know visit Russia from time to time, and they know that things are much better here, so I’m sure they believe that Finland is worth defending.”

But some Finns still fear that a small minority of Russians may knowingly or unknowingly harm their new home country. And when it comes to ethnic Russians, there’s the looming specter of their conscription duties in Russia, the Kremlin’s monitoring of its citizens abroad and Moscow’s attempts to recruit spies. Indeed, some Finns worry that while ethnic Russians may have no bad intentions, the Kremlin may try to take advantage of them.

“We’re aware that some of our conscripts have also done military service in Russia, or will do so,” says a high-ranking Finnish defense official, who declined to be identified due to the issue’s sensitivity. “That’s something we have to take account of in our planning. It’s all a question of common sense and risk management.”

Though the official declined to give details of the military’s plans, he says conscripts rarely get access to classified information. But the Finnish military, he adds, is also careful not to limit Russian conscripts to particular duties just because they hold dual citizenship. “We’re a democratic nation,” the official says. “Each citizen is equal, and that applies to the armed forces as well.”

Russia’s defense attaché in Finland and Finland’s Swedish-Russian association did not respond to requests for comment. The new Helsinki office of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, the Kremlin’s in-house think tank, also could not be reached for comment.

As for Vadim, he never realized he was a cause for concern. In fact, he says he thoroughly enjoyed his military service.



Saurabh Das/AP

CORRUPTION, MURDER AND THE FUTURE OF ASTROLOGY IN INDIA

ASTROLOGY IS BIG BUSINESS IN INDIA. IT CAN ALSO GET YOU MURDERED.

Kurapati Nagaraju is one of India's wealthiest astrologers. He's also very lucky. Several months ago, two gunmen on motorcycles skidded to a halt near his house, pumped three bullets into his gut and fled. Rushed to the

hospital, Nagaraju survived—only to be jailed on murder charges.

Three of Nagaraju's relatives—also wealthy astrologers—were much less fortunate. Last year, they were bumping down the highway outside of town when a Toyota minivan swung in behind them. Then it accelerated, roaring past the astrologers' Chevy and forcing it off the road. Three contract killers jumped out and sprayed the Chevy with bullets, killing everyone but the driver.

The victims should have seen it coming—and not because they were astrologers. A few months earlier, Nagaraju and his Gandham clan allegedly arranged the brutal murder of Durga Rao, the charismatic scion of the rival Buthams, and Durga's relatives vowed revenge, according to a local police report. In separate reports, the police say Butham family members are suspects in the attempt on Nagaraju's life and the murder of his relatives. Nagaraju has yet to face trial and says his enemies have framed him, according to a local prosecutor.

It's suddenly dangerous to be a prosperous prognosticator in this country. In recent years, as astrologers and gurus have emerged as fixers and go-betweens for India's often-corrupt politicians, violence has grown increasingly common in that line of work. In 2012, hitmen dressed as police officers gunned down an astrologer who advised powerful politicians in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. His murder, police say, was the result of disputes with rival kingmakers over local elections and construction contracts.

In the neighboring state of Haryana, a guru—who critics say operated with impunity for years because politicians relied on him to deliver votes from his devotees—faces charges of rape, murder and fraud, among other things. (He says his enemies fabricated the charges.) And last year, another Haryana guru barricaded himself in a compound with as many as 15,000 followers to avoid being arrested on

a charge of conspiracy to commit murder, in connection with a clash between his group and another sect. He, too, is said to have long enjoyed the support of local politicians.

Residents say the Buthams and Gandhams also have enough clout to call in small favors from state-level politicians. And the bloodshed between the two families in the village of Pinakadimi, the police say, seems to be the result of that battle for money and influence. As one local police source, who asked for anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the press, put it, "Durga and his rival Nagaraju were vying for control of the local political machine."

The Untouchable Astrologers

At first glance, Pinakadimi looks like a typical South Indian hamlet. Not far from the ditch where assassins threw Durga's body, a handful of water buffalo amble across the village's main street, a narrow dirt road. Piles of harvested corn dry in the sun in the adjacent field. But Pinakadimi is not a typical town; it's known as "the village of the astrologers," as many of its 500-odd families earn their living through astrology and fortune-telling, catering to clients across the country and even overseas. Not long after I arrive, a slim man with a neat mustache accosts me and offers an impromptu reading. "You will be rich," he says. "You will have two wives and five children." (He's zero for three so far, but I'm only 44.)

In a sign of the astrologers' new wealth, many villagers have multistory homes rather than the simple huts common in Indian villages. The garish pink houses of the Buthams and the gaudy blue homes of the Gandhams have satellite dishes and are decorated with expensive enamel tiles. Both families have set up lucrative fortune-telling businesses in Mumbai, New Delhi and other major Indian cities, and make frequent trips to meet clients in Australia, Japan and Singapore, among other places. Their customers, according to local journalists, include international businessman

Lakshmi Mittal, as well as top local politicians and film stars.

The rise of the two families represents a remarkable leap across caste barriers, experts say. For centuries, astrology was the domain of high-caste Brahmins. Traced to the ancient Hindu texts known as the Vedas, it was a priestly discipline, used for matchmaking and to identify auspicious days for weddings. So-called “remedial astrology”—which involves the sales of gems, charms and rituals as remedies to counter bad planetary alignments—is a more lucrative offshoot (astrologers sell both trinkets and advice). Such services were not available to the lowest castes, however, because the Brahmin priests considered them untouchable. So the Jangalu caste, which the Buthams and Gandhams belong to, had a vast audience for their predictions, rituals and remedies.

As long as that audience remained poor, the itinerant fortune-tellers couldn’t make much of a living. But since the 1990s, the lower castes have become a potent social and political force. The erstwhile untouchables and menial laboring castes together make up more than half of India’s population and have given rise to regional parties that have displaced both the Indian National Congress Party and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party—the country’s dominant political groups—in half a dozen states. This shift shrugged off centuries of prejudice, but it has created a Boss Tweed-style patronage system, as lower-caste leaders distributed contracts and government jobs to garner support.

The feud between the Butham and Gandham clans is rooted in a fight for the spoils, police say. Already rivals in the astrology business and real estate speculation, the two families had also become embroiled in a long-running dispute, the result of a Romeo-and-Juliet-style romance gone wrong. In defiance of the traditional arranged marriages, Nagaraju’s niece ran away with Durga's nephew in 2006. After heated negotiations, the families reluctantly agreed to

let the young couple marry. But there was no happily ever after.

Not long after the wedding, the relationship fell apart, and the marriage's demise deepened the enmity between the two families and ended any hopes they might share political power. Both families donated heavily to rival campaigns for the local state assembly, and before the killings began last year, they backed competing candidates to head the local village council, a key conduit for government-funded projects. "The Gandhams were jealous of [Durga] because of his popularity," says his widow, Tirupathamma. "He was always generous to the people of the village, and people of all communities came to him for help and advice."

The police paint a less flattering portrait. Just before the local polls, Durga apparently ditched the candidate he'd been supporting in the race for village council chief and threw his money and support behind another man, said the local police officer. Police say the maneuver may also have been part of the motive for the attack.

'He Was Covered in Blood'

Today, Tirupathamma is living under police protection. A solidly built woman with a broad face and long hair, she wears a bright-green sari printed with purple flowers and a dozen red and gold bangles on both wrists when I meet her on the porch of a massive bungalow. Standing between two armed police officers, she produces a smartphone and swipes through a series of professional-looking photos of her husband—a strikingly handsome man with the wavy, swept-back hair of a South Indian film star. Wearing black aviators and a tight-fitting shirt, he strides boldly toward the camera in one of the pics. In another, embossed with the Michael Jackson's name, he poses like the singer.

Tirupathamma's voice cracks and her eyelids flutter as she describes the night her husband was killed. (The police say at least four attackers stabbed him 16 times.) After his usual dinner of an apple and two chapatis, a type

of unleavened bread, Durga went for a walk. Tirupathamma was washing the dishes when she heard people shouting outside. She stepped onto her balcony to see what was going on. “Durga has been attacked,” one of the villagers shouted. Durga's brother went out to find him, Tirupathamma says. When he came back, he was covered in blood. “He told me that Durga had been murdered, and he collapsed on the ground.”

Nagaraju’s first hearing is slated for August, at which time he’ll apply for bail. The trial itself may drag on for decades, due to the Indian court system’s glacial pace. For Tirupathamma, the resolution can’t come soon enough. As she speaks, a tear rolls down her cheek. “I vowed that I will not begin mourning until all my husband's killers have been eliminated.”



Joshua Roberts/Reuters

REVOLUTIONARY (AND HYPOCRITICAL?) SUPREME COURT MAKES GAY MARRIAGE LEGAL

THE RULING SHOWS AN ACTIVIST COURT, FOR BOTH THE RIGHT AND LEFT.

The Supreme Court's sweeping ruling on gay marriage marks a stunning expansion of gay rights and also

provides more proof that the high court is one of the most revolutionary (and hypocritical?) in living memory, and continues to infuriate and hearten both left and right.

Friday's 5-4 decision makes same-sex marriage a constitutional right that cannot be limited by any state legislature. In his majority opinion in a case involving a gay citizen suing the state of Ohio, Justice Anthony Kennedy, appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1988, declared of gay Americans, "Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right."

Kennedy, a devout Catholic, has emerged as an unlikely champion of gay rights. His memorable votes include supporting a 2003 stunner decision striking down a short-lived 1986 ruling upholding state sodomy laws, and a 2013 ruling, United States v. Windsor, that declared the federal government could not deny spousal benefits to married gay couples. Two years ago, conservatives denounced Windsor as revolutionary and claimed it would lead inexorably to a right to gay marriage. Kennedy and others held then that it was a shift in keeping with precedent. It led to an explosion of rulings around the country in favor of same-sex marriage that the Supreme Court refused to hear on appeal and thus left standing. What about the remaining states that still bar same-sex marriage? On Friday, the court finally settled the matter.

The dissents from the court's conservatives, including Chief Justice John Roberts, were blistering. Each dissenting justice wrote an opinion, with Antonin Scalia, the other Reagan appointee on the court, using his characteristically florid language. He castigated the ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges as a judicial overreach. He used the word hippie to strengthen his argument, labeled the ruling a putsch (a German word often associated with Hitler and similar to the

French term coup d'état) and compared its reasoning to that found in a "fortune cookie."

In more measured but still scathing language, Roberts compared the ruling to Roe v. Wade, the historic 1973 decision that struck down state bans on abortion. "If you are among the many Americans—of whatever sexual orientation—who favor expanding same-sex marriage, by all means celebrate today's decision," Roberts wrote in Obergefell. "Celebrate the achievement of a desired goal. Celebrate the opportunity for a new expression of commitment to a partner. Celebrate the availability of new benefits. But do not celebrate the Constitution. It had nothing to do with it."

Roberts and Scalia are right. This was an activist decision. The court could have left the matter to the states to resolve. It could have issued a narrow ruling that compelled states without same-sex marriage to recognize those performed in other states. In other words, South Dakota would not have been forced to allow gay marriages but would have to recognize the marriages of Minnesotans who moved there.

President Barack Obama, a former editor of the Harvard Law Review who taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago, recognized that this was a major decision and not a cautious, incremental one. "Progress on this journey often comes in small increments. Sometimes two steps forward, one step back, compelled by the persistent effort of dedicated citizens," he said before placing a call to the winning plaintiff, Jim Obergefell. "And then sometimes there are days like this, when that slow, steady effort is rewarded with justice that arrives like a thunderbolt."

He went on to discuss the sweep of a ruling "that will end the patchwork system we currently have [and the] uncertainty hundreds of thousands of same-sex couples face from not knowing whether they're marriage, legitimate in the eyes of one state, will remain if they decide to move or even visit another."

Related: How Jim Obergefell's Fight for His Dying Spouse Legalized Gay Marriage in America

It was a bold ruling, the capstone of an extraordinary political and social transformation in American life. Less than 20 years ago, civil unions granting gay couples a handful of legal rights but not marital status were rare, an oddity in small, liberal-leaning Vermont and Hawaii. Today, "civil union" is a quaint term, and 30 states and the District of Columbia allow same-sex marriage. And after today, no state may bar it. The only recourse for opponents, a constitutional amendment, could never pass.

The Supreme Court's role in expanding gay marriage reflects the gung-ho activism of left and right that all justices decry but that all have had a hand in. That's what makes this court revolutionary or hypocritical or both, depending on your views regarding their controversial rulings.

Since Roberts was confirmed as chief justice in 2005, the court has not only enshrined a right to same-sex marriage but also overturned a century's worth of campaign finance laws and struck down an important section of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, one of the most venerated laws in American history and one that Congress has renewed repeatedly almost unanimously.

Liberals decried the activism of the Roberts rulings on voting rights and campaign finance—rulings in which their beloved Justice Kennedy was in the conservative majority—just as conservatives are denouncing the gay marriage ruling today. Left and right argue that the rulings they favor were logical extensions of previous holdings rather than the creation of new law out of thin air.

The activism of the Roberts court stands in stunning contrast to the chief justice's claim during his 2005 confirmation that he wanted a humble court and saw himself as only "an umpire" calling "balls and strikes." (His statement is reminiscent of a campaign claim by the man who appointed him, President George W. Bush. In 2000,

Bush said he wanted a humble foreign policy, and then led the U.S. into two wars.) Liberals were outraged by the Citizens United ruling that lifted bans on some kinds of corporate campaign donations and helped usher in today's super PACs, so richly on display in the 2016 presidential campaign.

They also heaped scorn on the voting rights decision, denouncing it as a court-led halt to progress for social justice and a return to a darker era in American history. The court argued it was merely asking Congress to re-calibrate the standards by which it determined which states fall under the Voting Rights Act's emergency powers, but critics saw it, with some justification, as an emasculation of the statute's strongest powers: the ability to make jurisdictions "preclear" any changes in voting procedures with either the Department of Justice or a panel of the circuit court in D.C.

This court has struck down fewer laws than its recent predecessors have, but that point ignores the importance of those laws that the Roberts court scrapped. Campaign finance, voting rights and marriage are central to American democracy in a way that presidential recess appointments—another ruling that changed current practice—are not.

The gay-marriage decision underscored the truth behind the quadrennial cliché that the upcoming presidential election will have a profound impact on the court and American society for many years hence. The replacement of elderly justices like Kennedy (78), Scalia (79), Ruth Bader Ginsburg (82) and Stephen Breyer (76) could easily tip the court in one direction. The court could swing left or right, depending on who is elected president in 2016, in ways that are unpredictable. But the court seems to be on an activist trajectory as long as Roberts is at the helm, and at 60 he's likely to have his hand on the tiller for a long time.

Since the 1950s, conservatives have vowed No More Earl Warrens!, a reference to President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1953 appointment of a Republican California

governor as chief justice. Warren shocked the right by proving to be a liberal hero on issues like school prayer and criminal rights. Conservatives and Ike himself felt betrayed by him and other justices tapped in the ’50s, including William Brennan and, to a lesser extent, Potter Stewart. Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush appointed jurists whom conservatives thought would be reliable—Harry Blackmun (1970), author of the Roe opinion; John Paul Stevens (1975); and David Souter (1990)—and were profoundly disappointed.

That pattern continued with Kennedy’s votes on gay marriage. (Liberal presidents have faced far fewer surprises; perhaps only John F. Kennedy appointee Byron White was deemed an ideological traitor.) No doubt, Republican candidates will now vow No More Anthony Kennedys!, but they’re likely to be disappointed. No president can count on ideological purity from the men and women they appoint to the court, especially over the many years these judges sit on the bench. And the activism of the justices in Roberts’s court—whether it yields liberal rulings like gay marriage or conservative ones—seems here to stay.



Wicab

FDA APPROVES DEVICE THAT HELPS BLIND SEE WITH TONGUE

ELECTRODES PLACED IN USERS' MOUTHS PROVIDE THEM WITH A NEW WAY TO SENSE THEIR SURROUNDINGS.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved a new device that allows blind people to sense objects with the the aid of their tongue. The BrainPort V100, a battery-powered device, works along with a cane or guide dog, and

helps a person process visual images and better sense their surroundings.

The BrainPort V100, manufactured by the company Wicab based in Middleton, Wisconsin, includes a video camera mounted on a pair of glasses. The glasses also have a fixture that goes inside the mouth; that part of the device contains 400 electrodes the user places on his or her tongue. When the device captures images with the video camera, it transports the picture as electric signals to the mouthpiece through vibrations. The user feels what the company describes as “moving bubble-like patterns”—like a mouthful of seltzer—on the surface of the tongue, allowing him to “see” the shape and contours of objects by sensing the vibration or tingling. Light-colored pixels are felt on the tongue as strong stimulation, grey pixels produce medium stimulation and black pixels don’t produce any stimulation.

The camera works in a variety of lighting and even has a zoom feature. With the appropriate training, the user can learn to interpret the signals and will then have the ability to sense the location, position, size and shape of objects and determine if the objects are in motion or still. Users typically complete a minimum of 10 hours of one-on-one training on the device.



Ian Waldie/Getty

TECHNOLOGY TO END CHILDHOOD DROWNING

EVERY SUMMER SEES A SPIKE IN ACCIDENTAL DEATHS, BUT SOME THINK THEY HAVE DEVICES TO STYMY TRAGEDIES.

April 8, 2014, began as a postcard-perfect, cerulean-skied South Florida day. Harmani and Harmony West, 2-year-old twins of Deerfield Beach, Florida, had whiled away the morning hours under the care of their uncle, coloring and playing with dolls, waiting for their parents to return home

from their work shift at Target. When their parents arrived a little past noon, Harmani and Harmony cuddled in bed with Mom and Dad for their afternoon nap. Their parents were the first to fall asleep.

They awoke to a nightmare: their daughters missing, the heavy front door of their apartment ajar. Somehow the girls had slipped out—pushing open the front door that the toddlers had never been able to open—and walked down two flights of stairs to one of the apartment complex's glistening pools. According to the family's attorney, Andrew Yaffa, the pool gate was "stuck in the open position, and had been broken for days—even though tenants had complained." The girls' father, Howard West, spotted his little ones surrounded by police and EMT workers, struggling to bring them back to life. Minutes before, a vacationing North Carolina couple had pulled out their bodies, called 911 and initiated CPR. But it was too late. "We live with a pain that no one can take away," says West. "And even though we have a new baby, [3-month-old] Heaven, she doesn't replace the loss. She can't take away the pain."

The numbers will leave you with a sinking feeling: Roughly 10 Americans drown each day. Among children, like the West twins, between the ages of 1 and 4 drowning is the No. 1 cause of unintentional death, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most childhood accidents occur in swimming pools. Summer is, of course, the deadliest season.

Much of the risk stems from children swimming when they shouldn't. In a 2010 University of Memphis study commissioned by the USA Swimming Foundation, more than half of the kids sampled in six urban cities reported little to low swimming ability. "Yet many of these same kids tell us they will go in the water at least five times in the summer," says Carol Irwin, one of the study's authors. While countries ranging from the United Kingdom to Bangladesh require swimming lessons as part of their public

school curriculum, that's not the case in the United States. A handful of state legislators have pushed for taxpayer-funded lessons, but results—mostly because it's hard to find funding—have been lukewarm. Instead, the burden has fallen on local recreational centers, national organizations like the American Red Cross and USA Swimming, and, of course, parents.

Many are turning to new consumer technologies. One example is the SEAL SwimSafe band, a lightweight necklace worn by swimmers. When submerged beyond a preset number of seconds, the radio-frequency-controlled band and its corresponding control hub (placed outside the water) will set off a series of graduated alarms and strobe lights, alerting guardians or lifeguards of potential distress.

Dr. Graham Snyder, a father of two young kids, engineer and emergency room physician in Raleigh, North Carolina, is behind SwimSafe. "Drowning doesn't look like a struggle, there is no yelling or arm waving. It is painfully silent," says Snyder, who has treated numerous victims and spent hours studying surveillance videos of public pool accidents. "If adults don't know what to look for, they can miss the signs. It looks like a game, the child is rhythmically bobbing up and down, until they don't come up again."

Snyder spent the past five years developing his monitoring band, which he says is useful for swimmers of all levels and ages: nonswimmers (instantaneous alarms); relay-racing children (20 seconds); adult athletes (who can safely swim underwater for up to a minute); and the elderly. A hub, charger and band retail for around $400; each extra band is $150. One hub can monitor dozens of bands at once. Over 15,000 pool and spa stores across the U.S. will sell the sets, but Snyder is quick to point out that SwimSafe does not replace lessons or adult supervision. "This is just another layer of protection for when people are on high alert and ready to fix a dangerous situation," he says.

Several YMCAs across North Carolina are already using SwimSafe bands in their summer programs. Later this fall, a major cruise line will offer passengers the bands. Kathleen Wollin Pluchinsky says she wishes the bands had been around in 2007, when her 4-year-old son, John, drowned at a posh Houston summer camp. Even though John had taken many swimming lessons and even though lifeguards and counselors were in and around the pool (the camp boasted an almost 2-1 adult-to-child ratio), his struggle for air went unnoticed.

“Every safeguard that I expected would be in place relied on human beings to implement, identify or manage,” says Pluchinsky. “Despite the failure at every human level, I believe that John would be alive today if he had been fitted with a monitor.”

Another device aimed at curtailing swimming tragedies is the iSwimband, a battery-powered monitor that attaches to a headband or a pair of goggles. After a neighborhood child nearly drowned at his Connecticut summer camp, three fathers joined forces to design and manufacture the product. The iSwimband uses Bluetooth technology to connect to an app parents can download for free onto their IOS or Android device. If a child is underwater for a predetermined number of seconds, a piercing siren is triggered. The iSwimband retails for $59.99 and is sold at Toys R Us and online at Target and Wal-Mart. “We figure if parents will spend $120 on a pair of Nikes for their kids, they can afford an iSwimband,” says Paul Newcomb, the company’s chief operating officer. To date, over 16,000 orders have been placed. Paul Chu, the company’s CEO, says that global sales are projected to reach 100,000 in the next year. The next generation of iSwimbands, he says, will link up to a cloud-based service and allow for up to 100 bands to connect at once.

These monitors are not the first of their kind. They have roots in the simpler Safety Turtle, a battery-powered

wristband for nonswimmers that launched in 1999. A bright-colored turtle attaches to a nylon band that is secured by lock and key. It looks like a prize you'd find in a Happy Meal, except that the second it gets wet a radio signal is sent to the base, triggering an alarm. A base and single band sell for $150. RJE, the company that manufactures Safety Turtle, also sells a similar device designed for pets.

Aquatic safety gizmos are not just a poolside priority. In Santiago, Chile, X-Cam and Green Solutions have partnered to bring "drone-aided lifeguard towers" to the shore. Equipped with GPS trackers, specialized drones will transport and release flotation devices to potential victims, as well as relay instructions through built-in speakers. Studies have shown that a drone can reach a victim almost three minutes faster than a skilled lifeguard. X-Cam's drones fly on rechargeable lithium batteries that are rebooted at their solar-powered towers, which will also double as cellphone charging stations, Wi-Fi centers and promotional hubs. Businesses are being courted to sponsor the $2,000 drones, their hubs and human operators in exchange for getting their logo on the towers. So far, two of Chile's most crowded beaches—Viña del Mar and Algarrobo—will debut these rescue drones next summer (Chile's summer months are December through February). Similar programs are also being developed in the United States and in Iran.

Still, not everyone is comfortable with widgets wading in their waters. "In supervised settings, technology can add a layer of protection and reduce certain types of drownings, but they can also contribute to a relaxed sense of supervision on the part of parents and lifeguards," says Francesco Pia, a renowned drowning-prevention expert. Pia says nothing can replace lessons. A study in JAMA Pediatrics concluded that for many youngsters, lessons reduced the risk of drowning by 88 percent. "But lessons will not make your child drown-proof," counters Pluchinsky, who after the death of her son launched her swim-safety site, swimsafe4life.com, and

started numerous local and state safety campaigns. “So many other activities have already embraced technology to make them safer. Isn’t it time that swimming followed suit?”



Eric Gay/AP

SARGASSUM IS RUINING BEACHES FROM TEXAS TO TOBAGO

IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, THE SEAWEED HAS BEGUN TO TURN UP IN UNPRECEDENTED AMOUNTS.

The road along the east side of Tobago, running from the airport to the village of Speyside, passes dozens of small beaches where, in normal times, people lounge on the sand beneath palm trees and swim in the clear blue waters that lap

at the shore. But on this mid-May weekend, sand and sea lay hidden beneath several feet of thick, brown seaweed.

Sargassum, a vine-like, floating algae, regularly circulates throughout the Gulf of Mexico and North Atlantic, where it forms the nearly 2 million-square-mile Sargasso Sea. Mariners recorded its presence as far back as Christopher Columbus's time. The seaweed often washes up on beaches in the Gulf, the southern U.S. Atlantic coast and the northern Caribbean in spring and summer. But in 2011, it began showing up in unprecedented amounts, sometimes in places it hadn't been seen before. On a single day in May 2014, for example, more than 8,400 tons of the stuff—the most ever recorded for a 24-hour period—buried a three-mile stretch of beach on Galveston Island, Texas.

As with many recent dramatic changes to the environment, the reason for the sargassum explosion appears to be a combination of factors resulting from climate change. That means scenes such as those in Tobago and Texas could be the new normal: an inconvenience for beachgoers and a potential economic disaster for those who earn their living from tourism and other coastal industries.

Mats of sargassum provide habitat and food for a wide variety of marine species, including sea turtles, fish, invertebrates, marine mammals and even birds, which depend on it to fuel over-water migrations. It rains down particulates to nourish creatures in the ocean's depths. If the open sea is a desert, sargassum mats are its oases. They can help the beaches too: Driven onto shores by wind and waves, the algae mats add nutrients to the beach ecosystem and help build and strengthen dunes, which protect land and the structures behind them from storms.

But in such large quantities, sargassum has a dark side. For one, it tends to drive away tourists, who come to the shore for sand, not seaweed. Not all affected communities have the resources to remove the stuff, and even those that do find dealing with the increasing amounts a struggle. In

addition, in Tobago and elsewhere, fishermen have been unable to fish in the thick seaweed. Heavy accumulations on the water may harm coral reefs and, on the beach, prevent sea turtle nesting.

Spikes of sargassum were first recorded in the Greater and Lesser Antilles (including Trinidad and Tobago) in 2011 and 2012. The problem appears to have begun many miles away. In recent years, the Amazon basin has experienced some of the world's highest rates of deforestation. And without vegetation to hold soil in place, rain washes that soil and whatever it contains into streams and rivers. So when the Amazon basin saw greater than normal amounts of rain in 2011 and 2012, unusually high levels of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus washed into Atlantic waters around the mouth of the Amazon River off the north coast of Brazil. Sargassum passed through this nutrient-rich water and responded by growing like, well, a weed. Ocean currents carried it from there to the Lesser Antilles and western Caribbean.

Jim Franks, a senior research scientist at the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, recently created a website to collect eyewitness reports of large quantities of sargassum. Those reports confirm the seaweed is showing up in areas where before it had been seen only rarely or not all. Circulation patterns in the equatorial Atlantic even carried mats to Africa for the first time. Satellite data suggest the amount of sargassum in the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean and Atlantic may hit an all-time high in 2015.

"For [Caribbean] communities, such an overwhelming influx is difficult to deal with," says Franks, who has worked in the region for years. "It radically impacted tourism on some islands, creating economic and environmental hardship. I can't overemphasize how important this is to the region," he adds. "We need a well-thought-out strategy of response."

Last summer, city officials in Galveston posted signs and handed out fliers touting the seaweed's many virtues. The Galveston Park Board sent out 50 trained volunteers, dubbed the Bucket Brigade, to show beachgoers all the interesting little critters living in it. While these efforts didn't change the fact that the beaches were covered, the city hoped they would change how Galveston visitors felt about the seaweed.

It didn't. Most visitors think of a coast covered in sargassum as "a dirty beach," says David Parsons, city manager in Port Aransas, Texas. This community on Mustang Island, just north of Corpus Christi, is developing machinery that uses a rake-like mechanism to pick up seaweed but leaves the surrounding wet sand. They hope to take the seaweed to remote parts of the beach to allow it to break down naturally—far from sunbathers and swimmers.

Tobago's Division of Agriculture, Marine Affairs, Marketing and the Environment began removing sargassum from 16 beaches in early May, but officials noted that it continued to wash ashore in such quantities that efforts to clear it were futile. Some Caribbean islands use mechanical rakes and tractors to remove sargassum, but others have only hand rakes and animal-drawn wagons. Even when removing sargassum from the beach is possible, it raises the question of where to dump tons of decomposing vegetation.

One solution may be to dry and compact the seaweed into bales, and then use those bales as the base of new dunes. The theory is that these seaweed-based dunes will withstand waves and storm surges even better than natural ones. That won't help beaches that don't have dune systems, of course, which includes many of those in the Caribbean. Sargassum is sometimes used as fertilizer, but there's not a high enough demand for that to make a dent in the amounts piling up. Dumping seaweed offshore may be an option, but it would also require heavy equipment and could potentially harm the marine environment.

Technology is at least helping us track the stuff. The University of Florida's College of Marine Science posts links to real-time satellite observations of areas in the Gulf, Caribbean Sea and central Atlantic that can show the location of significant amounts of sargassum. In April, at a symposium held to discuss research and the economic and environmental effects of the "sargassum situation," NASA and Texas A&M University at Galveston scientists unveiled the Sargassum Early Advisory System, or SEAS. This smartphone app combines satellite images with water current and wind data to predict where and when mats are likely to come ashore.

Such early warnings will be more helpful for communities with the resources to respond. Knowing an invasion is coming won't always help vacationers, who tend to book trips several months in advance, and, of course, warning away tourists is exactly what affected communities don't want to do. But until scientists and policymakers come up with better solutions, that may be their only choice.



LUSA/EPA

WHAT YOUR BRAIN LOOKS LIKE AFTER A NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

RESEARCHERS STUDYING PEOPLE WHO WERE ALMOST IN A PLANE CRASH HAVE FOUND THAT TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES GENERATE 'EMOTIONALLY ENHANCED' MEMORIES.

On August 24, 2001, Air Transat Flight 236, with 306 passengers and crew members aboard, began its

scheduled flight from Toronto to Lisbon, Portugal, but didn't quite make it. Midway over the Atlantic Ocean, there was a fuel leak, then a power outage, and Captain Robert Piché and First Officer Dirk de Jager decided to make an emergency landing. The lights went off, the engines failed, cabin depressurization began, and passengers were given instructions for the deployment of life jackets and oxygen masks.

Just after announcing the plane was about to go into the water, Piché spotted a runway in the Azores, the volcanic islands about 900 miles off the coast of Portugal. To lose altitude, he conducted one 360-degree turn and additional S-turns. Passengers screamed as the plane swung around, then back and forth, but outside their windows they saw water turn to land. Warning his passengers to brace themselves, Piché then aimed for the landing strip, and the plane hit it twice before the crew could apply maximum braking pressure and bring the 200-ton aircraft to a stop. Miraculously, nobody died.

In the years since, the survivors of that near-death experience have become a sort of lab experiment for researchers trying to understand the long-term consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The person who proposed studying these survivors was Dr. Margaret McKinnon, an associate professor of psychiatry and neuroscience at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and one of the passengers on Flight 236. She developed PTSD after that harrowing landing.

"The study was an opportunity to turn something negative into a positive experience and hopefully make a contribution to the science of PTSD," she says.

In an initial experiment conducted three years after the traumatic incident, 15 passenger-participants—seven with PTSD—completed a memory test to probe the quality of their memories of the flight. "Everyone on board had a different experience," says McKinnon. Uncomfortable

discussing the details of her trauma from that day, she just says, “I thought I would die and came to some form of acceptance around that.”

For the study, participants also were asked to recall two other events: their memories of the events of 9/11 and a neutral autobiographical event. These two other memories would serve as comparison points and help the researchers understand how trauma affects memory.

“There were two main findings from that study,” says Brian Levine a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto and one of the researchers on the project. First, all the passengers remembered a remarkably large amount of detail from the Air Transat incident. Levine refers to this as emotionally enhanced memory. “Everyone on the plane generated two to three times more information about that event than other events we tested,” he says.

The second finding was that the people with PTSD tended to veer off-topic when interviewed about the near-crash, recalling additional but somewhat irrelevant information, compared with the people without PTSD. This suggests they have problems with their control over memory, says Levine. Interestingly, those with PTSD not only remembered more external, tangential details from the traumatic plane landing; their recollections of 9/11 and the neutral event were also cluttered with superfluous details.

Nearly a decade following this initial stage of research, eight passengers agreed to return for a second chapter of the study. This group, which had a brain scan, ranged in age from 30s to 60s and included some who had been diagnosed with PTSD. Placed inside a functional MRI scanner, the eight passengers recalled details of their experience on Flight 236 while they watched the Discovery Channel’s video re-creation of the incident, which included looking down on the island where the emergency landing took place.

“I can tell you, I re-experienced the event, it was that evocative of the experience,” says McKinnon, who

participated in the study. “I felt I was suspended in the air again.”

She adds, “They say in trauma the body keeps the score,” and the study’s results provide a neurological explanation why: As the participants recalled their near-plane-crash experience, emotional memory regions of their brains lit up—the amygdala, hippocampus and midline frontal and posterior regions.

“Memory is an activation of a number of brain regions at once,” says Daniela Palombo, lead author of the study and a postdoctoral researcher at the Boston University School of Medicine. “The amygdala is classically involved in emotion, while the hippocampus is important to memory. The posterior regions play a role in visual imagery, and the prefrontal cortex comes onboard for self-referential processes.”

Following their latest Flight 236 re-creations, the passengers were asked to recall their experience of 9/11 while watching footage of the terrorist attacks, and, finally, they recalled a neutral autobiographical event. The participants’ brain activity when discussing 9/11 was similar to what had occurred during their memories of the near-plane-crash. And, as expected, the pattern did not occur when they recalled a neutral event. What was surprising, though, is that these patterns were not evident in people who hadn't been involved in a near-plane crash, even when they recalled 9/11 while undergoing a brain scan.

“People who have observed trauma might see the world differently,” says Palombo. She believes the emergency landing scare may have changed the way the brains of those passengers process new information. Following trauma, we may be more sensitive to painful life experiences, Palombo suggests, and so we view the world through new lenses. “The research supports the idea of a lasting memory trace, a carryover effect,” she says.

Those passengers would be more affected by 9/11 because, Palombo says, it "hits home—certainly we can imagine they would relate to 9/11 differently than other people." And PTSD research supports the idea that any element resembling the traumatic event will be perceived by a trauma survivor as threatening, even when it occurs in a safe environment.

The two studies also suggest that how you see the world to begin with may make you more or less predisposed to PTSD, should you undergo a traumatic experience. "Everybody's memory works differently," explains Levine. Some people remember events in a precise way, with relevant details lining up in an orderly fashion, while other people seem to take in more superfluous details in a more disorganized way.

"For people who have that second kind of memory, more extraneous information getting in, they may be more susceptible to PTSD when traumatized," Levine speculates. "It's the interplay between the cognitive systems and the emotional systems that may determine how you cope." In those who develop PTSD, "the emotional part may overwhelm the system," he says.

These findings add fuel to the theory that when it comes to PTSD, it's not so much that a traumatic memory exists but that it can be later triggered in unpredictable ways and at unexpected times. McKinnon's hope is that an enriched knowledge of brain activity following a traumatic experience could help advance current therapies built around processing these uncontrolled memories.



Denise Ofelia Mangen

HAVE WE GOT A STORY FOR YOU: 18 YEARS OF STORYTELLING AT THE MOTH

AFTER 18 YEARS, THE MOTH IS STILL ENTHRALLING AUDIENCES WITH TALES OF DESPAIR, DECEPTION AND HILARIOUS DEGRADATION.

A small helium balloon lazily rose above rows of seats slowly filling with people. Outside, it was a busy Friday evening in Manhattan, but under the high-domed ceiling

of the New York Public Library's Celeste Bartos Forum, a crowd gathered in front of a stage adorned with a single microphone. Through the warm din of chatter and upbeat music, the deep, lush hum of a cello signaled the start of the Moth High School GrandSLAM.

For 18 years now, the Moth, a nonprofit dedicated to the art and craft of storytelling, has brought the world "true stories told live" from luminaries and celebrities like Salman Rushdie, Molly Ringwald, Malcolm Gladwell, Ethan Hawke and Al Sharpton. But on a recent June night, it was 10 high school students from across New York City who would step up to that mic, one by one, for five minutes each.

The evening's host, comedian and Daily Show correspondent Hasan Minhaj, explained the basic rules of the Moth. The stories have a time limit enforced by the musician bowing her cello—she demonstrated a gentle high note she'd play at the five-minute cutoff and a lower, more menacing tone once they've gone a minute over. And the key, Minhaj added, was that these were not rants or monologues but stories from their lives that must be true.

"I'm wicked nervous," Diamante Ortiz, the first student to step up to the microphone, said quietly. The audience exploded with applause to encourage the junior from Brooklyn's Williamsburg neighborhood, who began to explain how the loose curls falling over the shoulders of her denim dress became purple after years of asking her mother if she could dye her hair. It wasn't really about the hair, Ortiz says she finally realized. Permission to get purple locks meant her mother saw her as responsible and trustworthy. She joked that her mother was, at that moment, probably taking an absurd number of photos of her, purple hair and all.

Mukhtar Essa, a junior at Flushing High School in Queens, used his newly acquired English to talk about communicating with teachers via Google Translate after he moved from Yemen a few years ago. Now he sees recent

arrivals sitting in the back row of the classroom and wishes he could speak their language; he'd like to tell them that it will be OK.

The stories were punctuated with laughing, sniffling and cheering from the audience. As Minhaj had instructed them, they "turned up" the applause more than if it had been Beyoncé up there. Adam Wade, a New Hampshire native who moved to New York City after college, says people come to these shows because they "want to actually feel something."

Aloft in a Loft

The Moth came out of muggy, bourbon-soaked nights on a porch in Georgia. George Dawes Green grew up on St. Simons Island, where as a young adult he often found himself at his friend Wanda Bullard's house. "We were all on the porch, and the screens were destroyed. Moths would come flocking in and around the porch light," Green recalls. "As we got drunker, the stories would flow."

Green later moved to New York City and become a successful novelist. He published The Caveman's Valentine and The Juror, with the latter made into a 1996 movie starring Demi Moore, Alec Baldwin, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, James Gandolfini and Anne Heche. The Caveman's Valentine hit the big screen in 2001, with a screenplay by Green and Samuel L. Jackson in the lead role. "I loved the sort of sophisticated life that I was living, but also felt deeply this lack of simple community," he says. He also grew annoyed at the "conversation vultures" who would swoop in at the slightest pause at New York parties. "Those generous, lovely nights [on Wanda's porch] were just with me for years afterwards. I just loved the idea of a community of people that would be able to gather and tell stories. Life for everybody in that group was richer."



People walk outside the Nuyorican Poets Cafe in New York on Dec. 1, 2012. The Moth's live events now range from "Mainstage" events held in larger theaters to "StorySLAM" performances held several times monthly in smaller venues like the Nuyorican Poets' Cafe, a Lower East Side nonprofit dedicated to the spoken word, and musical and theatrical performances.

Credit: Piotr Redlinski/The New York Times/Redux

He decided to host a storytelling evening in his Manhattan loft on June 6, 1997. He describes that first event as “a disaster,” with people droning on and on. At the time, “there were no public storytelling venues for the kinds of stories we were telling—personal, true stories. It was a dramatically new thing.”

Despite that “piss-poor” start, Green says a few friends urged him to try again. In the next few attempts—which mercifully took place in bars—he added a musician to prod people offstage. The time limit set the events apart from the poetry slams that were popular then, as did the lack of “fancy verbiage.... That’s what made the Moth so powerful—the connection between storyteller and audience that didn’t have a wall of artistry between the two,” Green says. “There is an art to it, but it’s not a fancy art.”

The most important story ingredient, he learned early on, was vulnerability. “A good raconteur talks about failure, their own human failure, and frailty,” he says. “There can be success in the stories, but they have to be grounded on failure.”

The name of his new storytelling endeavor was a nod to the porch and the moths that fluttered around the light. Those events Green held in the late 1990s were the basis of today’s Mainstage shows, the Moth’s flagship program that “features stories by luminaries in the arts and sciences, newsmakers and news breakers, and everyday heroes (and even a few reformed villains!).”

The Moth has been visiting high schools since 1998, but its High School SLAM was launched in 2012. It began podcasting in 2008 and the next year made its debut on the radio, where The Moth Radio Hour can now be heard on more than 400 stations. To date, more than 15,000 stories have been told through the Moth.

Like any young nonprofit organization, Green explains, the Moth experienced financial stress in its early years, over things like space rental and payroll. “There were several times when I thought we’d have to call it,” he recalls. “We went through really, really hard times,” dealing with an overabundance of ego and an under-abundance of money. But the moments of almost pulling the plug came and went. The Moth now puts on one or more events per month in 21 cities, including Los Angeles, Boston, Milwaukee, London and Dublin. It has also done special events like a show it produced with the U.S. State Department in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in August 2008. That show “featured locals who had been affected in some way by the region’s civil war,” according to the organization’s first book, The Moth: 50 True Stories (2013). Melbourne, Australia, will be added to the list of Moth spots in August, and, in early September, Sydney will have a Mainstage event at the Sydney Opera House.

Analoging On

The hunger for live events that evoke an emotional connection between the raconteur—as Green likes to call Moth storytellers—and listeners has perhaps become more acute in the 21st century. The warmth and honesty Green remembered from Wanda's porch "has been utterly blown away by Facebook and social media," he says, guessing that the rise of storytelling may be tied to feelings of detachment that comes with using these platforms. "You can't smell anybody, it's not real human interaction."

Steve Burns, famous for his role as the host of the children's television show Blue's Clues, stepped onto his first Moth stage in 2010. He is certain the Moth has flourished because of its decidedly old-school approach. "It's so analog and so unadorned," he says. "The simplicity of it really cuts through."

That might explain why dozens of storytelling organizations have been established since the Moth was founded in 1997. There's StoryCorps, Story Lab Chicago, Public School (in Los Angeles) and massmouth in Boston. One of the recent additions is Hartford, Connecticut-based Speak Up, founded by Matthew Dicks, a writer and elementary school teacher who began telling stories with the Moth in 2011. "There's no better place to tell a story than a SLAM. There's no better audience. They want you to succeed no matter what," says Dicks, who has won 20 StorySLAMS and three GrandSLAMS. He and his wife started their organization just over two years ago.

Adam Wade says the first time he got up onstage at a Moth show—to tell a story about feeling sad and alone living in a basement apartment near a cemetery in Fairview, New Jersey, when his only friend was the 400-pound deli guy at the store nearby—he was beyond scared, just as Diamante Ortiz was before talking about her purple hair. But when Wade stepped up to the mic that night at Manhattan's

Nuyorican Poets Cafe in December 2003, it was “almost like everybody was opening their arms, ready to hug me.”

Now, nearly 12 years after telling his first story, Wade says the minutes he spends onstage are the least nervous part of his day, and he’s poised to record his debut storytelling album in July. “You finally go up and it’s almost like your body is Alka-Seltzer; all that trouble just comes out of you,” he says. “When I go home from a Moth show, I always feel good. I don’t drink, but I’ve got a buzz.”



Yungchen Lhamo

A TIBETAN SINGER HELPS MENTALLY ILL PATIENTS FIND THEIR VOICE

SINGER YUNGCHEN LHAMO, WHO ESCAPED TIBET ON FOOT, IS NOW HELPING MENTALLY ILL PATIENTS IN THE U.S. ESCAPE.

Yungchen Lhamo's voice is an instrument that needs no adornment, a rich soprano of impossibly clear tone, with a light touch that belies a potent flow of energy. It can

skip, low and unhurried, down impressionistic pathways that nod to the Buddhist mantras of her native Tibet; it can surge, swift and quavering, into pious cries bordering on wails. Most often delivered a cappella, it has entertained the Dalai Lama and Bono; dueted with Natalie Merchant, Annie Lennox and Billy Corgan; and won a landmark international music award.

On a sunny June afternoon in Kingston, New York, a sleepy, sun-bleached town about two hours north of Manhattan, this voice fills a small, 15th-century Dutch church. It's part of a musical play called You Are Beautiful, I Am Beautiful, and Lhamo is sharing this stage with 13 residents of Chiz's Heart Street, a local homeless shelter for the mentally ill, most of them schizophrenic. Almost all of her actors are dressed in drag: The men wear long sundresses and shiny acrylic wigs; the women sport dark suits and smudged, drawn-on mustaches. They chant a song Lhamo wrote for them—a simple, pious, keening tune, also called "You Are Beautiful, I Am Beautiful"—and pace the narrow central aisle of the church, through their 100-person audience, grasping hands and beaming up at the vibrant red and yellow streamers draped for the occasion.

"When I grow up in Tibet, we don't hear so much [of the phrase] 'mental illness,' but here they say, 'Mental illness: Danger, don't go near them.' But really, what is mental illness—aren't we all sick in different ways?" Lhamo says after the play, in her gentle and occasionally halting English. She stands outside the church, praising each actor who passes by and affectionately adjusting their gender-bending outfits. "In Tibet, we believe once we become older, we become like child again. So today, I thought we could all play."

Lhamo has the beatific air of someone well versed in Buddhist stillness. She is "a living mandala," says Kingston Mayor Shayne Gallo. Born in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, with a name that augured beauty (her namesake is the Hindu/

Buddhist deity Sarasvati, goddess of music and knowledge), Lhamo fled her country in 1989 to escape the violence of the Chinese occupation. Crossing the Himalayas on foot with her infant son on her back, she rebuilt her life in India, then Australia. (She is reluctant to talk about this exodus. Her son, Tenzin Shaydrup, a former employee of a labor rights nongovernmental organization, is now 25, lives in Kingston and shrugs off the escape as “normal for that age and at that time.”)

In Australia, she released her debut album, Tibetan Prayer (1995), which merged folkloric rhythms with melismatic Buddhist devotionals. It won an ARIA Award (Australia’s equivalent of a Grammy) for best folk/world/traditional music album and made her the first Tibetan musician to ever win a high-profile mainstream music industry prize. Peter Gabriel signed her to his Real World Records, and she began enjoying rarified air: performances at Carnegie Hall in New York and the Louvre in Paris; inclusion on the Hollywood soundtrack to Seven Years in Tibet; pairing with Annie Lennox on Lhamo’s disc Ama and Natalie Merchant on that singer’s 1998 album Ophelia. Those efforts earned her reviews with words such as “exquisite” in The Guardian and “brilliant” in The New Yorker.

“Yungchen sings like an unearthly creature,” Merchant tells Newsweek. “Her voice has the power to stop time and makes everything else in the world fall away. Her voice transports you.”

Lhamo brushes off such praise. “I don’t believe so much in myself as a singer. For me, this is about medicine, using your energy to make the world an offering,” she says. Now in her mid-40s, she resides in Kingston to be near the Manhattan world music venues she headlines.

“Normally, people think Tibet means monks, chanting,” she says, chuckling. “So when [I won the ARIA], this

opened many people eyes. So this is good for Tibet as a country."

Lhamo's modest musical play was the product of her charity work at Chiz's Heart Street, and a visibly daunting experience for its actors. Many at Heart Street have struggled to interact with society; some languished, comatose, in psychiatric wards, and another spent time in prison for murder. While they flanked Lhamo before the church's ornate pulpit, their expressions shifted gradually from bashful to assertive as they acted out a playful arc about a family reunion. Then they shifted to autobiographical tales about their lives, the most turbulent anecdotes mumbled with downcast eyes: stories of broken families, drug addiction and physical disabilities. Throughout these performances, Lhamo embraced her actors maternally, light rippling over her sequined lilac chuba (a traditional Tibetan robe) and the peacock-shaped rhinestone clip pushing back her knee-length black hair.

Lhamo began volunteering seven months ago at Chiz's Heart Street, a pretty trio of converted Victorian homes near downtown Kingston. The boarding house generally houses 45 to 50 residents and is run with precision by Mary "Chiz" Chisholm, a former engineer and Vietnam War veteran with close-shorn white hair who monitors meals and medicine intake with empathetic vigor. Her work has been honored by the New York Senate.

On Lhamo's first visit to Heart Street, she sang to a timid, unresponsive audience. She returned unprompted the following week and has visited almost every Wednesday since. In those months, Lhamo's interactions with the residents bloomed from quiet conversation to dancing and singing—and, ultimately, putting on the play that would give the patients' newfound identities a real-world stage.

"She touched people that never let anybody touch them; she would hold them and let them cry. Without a doubt, she is holy," says Chisholm, 64, after the play, tears forming in

her eyes. “She touches that piece of them that brings out who they are as human beings. They felt beautiful today.”

Linda Jessat, an actor in You Are Beautiful, I Am Beautiful, is one of several residents at Chiz’s Heart Street diagnosed with late-onset schizophrenia. Before that struck her, she worked as a registered nurse at Benedictine Hospital, Kingston’s main psychiatric facility. “The people that I worked with for eight years were taking care of me. For a whole year, I was extremely depressed; I didn’t smile. I thought the world was ending,” Jessat, 66, says. “Chiz took me in, and then Yungchen came into our lives with unconditional love and made us smile again and feel worthy.”

Jessat admits she was hesitant to join the play’s cast, but is glad she did. “Today everyone is really, really happy and proud.”

In the past decade, Kingston’s community of mentally ill homeless individuals has surged. Gallo says Benedictine Hospital counts over 2,500 behavioral patients—more than one-tenth of the town’s population, according to the last census report, and a byproduct of New York state shutting down many psychiatric facilities over the past decade, a move related to the $5 billion in cuts made to mental health services nationwide.

The mayor calls his town a “dumping ground of deinstitutionalized patients” and says many of them end up on the streets or in unethical shelters. Across the country, diagnosed schizophrenics and other people with severe mental illnesses are often treated entirely with heavy regimens of antipsychotic medications that pack myriad adverse side effects. “You take into account how we’re treating these patients now—it’s like, ‘Here’s your meds, go stare off into space or look at the TV.’ There’s something barbaric and inhuman about that,” says Gallo.

He and Lhamo have discussed creating a business proposal that would expand her performance-as-outreach

program beyond Kingston. “Her work has had such an impact on these people’s lives. Her model is a very compassionate paradigm that could have quite a benefit to the mentally disabled population in our country.... A nexus of Western and Eastern could be very productive.”

Lhamo is writing her next solo album while working with the residents of Chiz’s Heart Street, many of whom are asking her to begin preparations for their second play, next year. As she ponders that, she points to the peacock ornament in her hair. “There are many animals that are beautiful, that do not dress up, are born like that,” she says softly. “So I compare that with human beings. All human beings are very beautiful. We need things—medicine, technology—but most, we need unconditional love.”



Sachin Teng

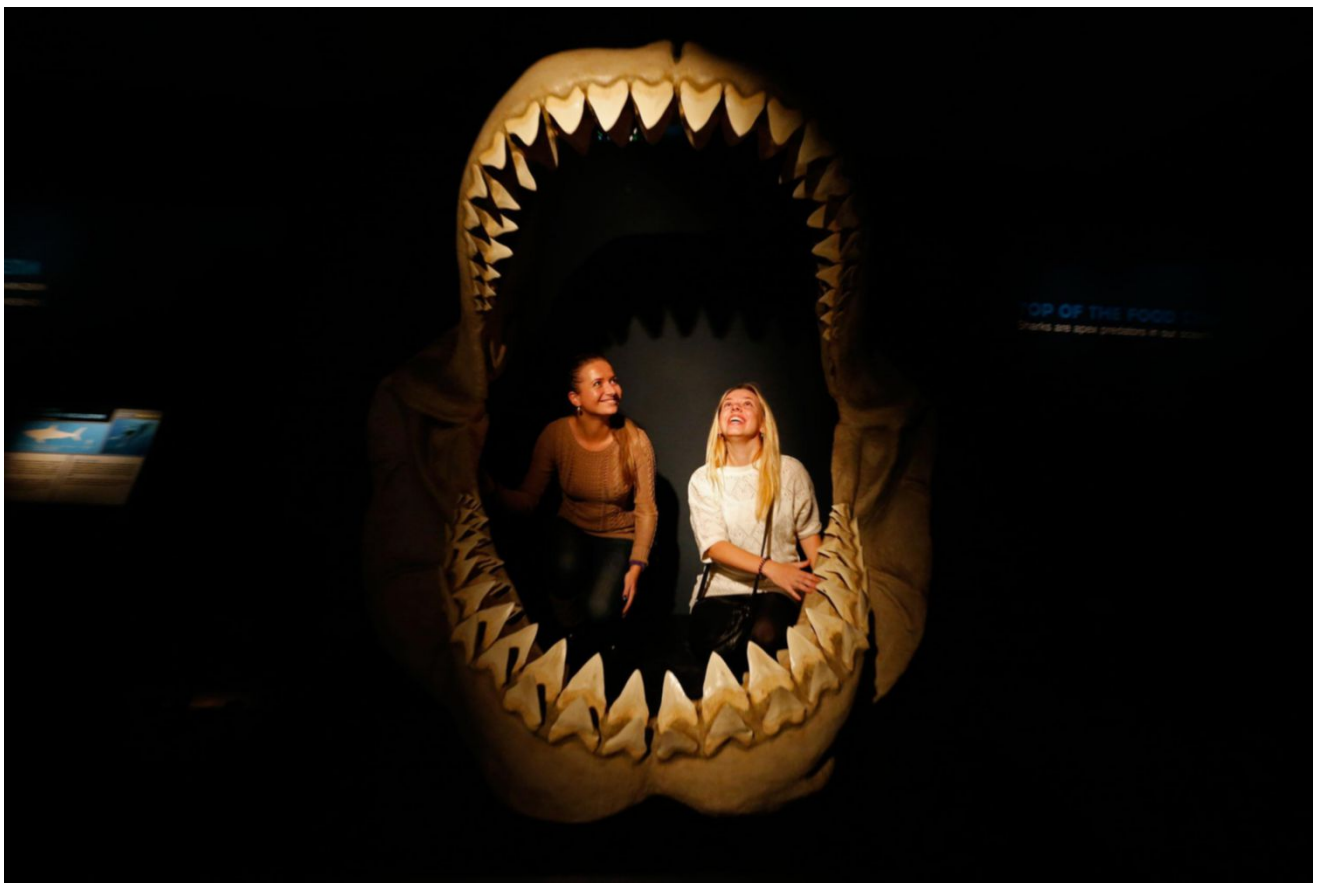
YOU'RE 100% WRONG ABOUT SHARK WEEK

SHOULD REAL SHARKS DIE SO THAT FAKE MEGALODON MIGHT LIVE? DISCOVERY SEEMS COOL WITH IT.

Just when you thought it was safe to turn the TV back on, Discovery Channel announced that Shark Week premieres July 5. This extravaganza started innocently enough in 1987, showing primarily shark-themed documentaries. But since then, Shark Week has evolved from a harmless programming block to a violent, lurking predator that devours attention spans and is responsible for some

of Discovery's highest ratings. In fact, it's become so beloved that Nat Geo Wild channel—Discovery's primary competitor—will be airing a SharkFest programming block that also starts on July 5.

Which might be great! After all, sharks are beautiful predators, and the jumping Great White scenes are pretty much the best part of Planet Earth. But Shark Week's problem hasn't been showing sharks in general, but what it chooses to show in particular. For years, Discovery has been airing more and more sensationalist Shark Week specials, though its nadir was in 2013. That year's Shark Week kicked off with a special called Megalodon: The Monster Shark Lives, a "documentary" that purported to show evidence —bolstered by first-person accounts from scientists and witnesses—that a 50-foot-long, prehistoric dino-shark still swam among us. Though the monster shark very much does not live, you wouldn't know it from tuning in: Only a small disclaimer that flashed on-screen for a few seconds (and that most viewers missed, if the social media freak-out that followed is any indication) revealed that Megalodon was fictitious. Outcry from the scientific community and some viewers' calls to boycott fell on ears deaf to anything but ratings, and 2014's programming didn't make the Discovery Channel any new scientist friends either.



Women laugh as they look at the jaws of a megalodon, an extinct species of shark, as they visit the "Planet Shark: Predator or Prey" exhibition at the Military-Historical Museum of Artillery, Engineer and Signal Corps in St. Petersburg, Russia in October 2013. Credit: Alexander Demianchuk/Reuters

“Last year, there was a problematic show called Zombie Sharks, which was showcasing tonic immobility: when you flip a shark over and they pass out,” says David Shiffman, a marine biologist and vocal critic of Shark Week, who often fact-checks Discovery’s claims from his Twitter account, @WhySharksMatter. “Some scientists and aquarium vets use this to safely secure an animal, but it shouldn’t be done just for fun.… Humans that describe a severe trauma in which they could see everything happening around them but they couldn’t move? That’s tonic immobility.” It's precisely that kind of programming that poses a threat to the shark’s image, and to the animal's survival.

“Twenty-four percent of all sharks, skates and rays are listed as ‘threatened with extinction,’” says Shiffman. “It’s a lot harder to get people to care about saving something if they’re irrationally afraid of it and think that it should be extinct. And Shark Week has played no small role in this

fearmongering.” Shiffman acknowledges that, of course, shark attacks are tragic, but “tens of millions of people, if not more, go swimming every year in the U.S. and we have an average of 50 bites and one fatality a year.” He adds that more people are killed annually by vending machines, cows or flowerpots falling on them. “Media coverage of an issue affects public opinion of it,” he says. “And the public opinion of sharks is overwhelmingly negative, which makes it harder to conserve threatened species.”

Shiffman says he’s “cautiously optimistic” that Shark Week will make a course correction: Discovery’s new president, Rich Ross, has promised to stop airing fake documentaries. But when the numbers indicate that the Megalodon follow-up pulled the strongest ratings of any show during Shark Week 2014, even cautious optimism might be too optimistic.



Reuters

'THE CARTEL' IS YOUR ANNUAL REMINDER THAT THE WAR ON DRUGS ISN'T OVER

IN TWO NOVELS SPANNING FOUR DECADES, DON WINSLOW GOES DEEP ON THE REAL-WORLD CONFLICT CONSUMING MEXICO.

Sitting across from crime novelist Don Winslow, I'm finding it hard to reconcile this soft-spoken, bespectacled man of 61 with the scene I keep replaying in my head: a

drug kingpin throwing two children off a bridge to send a message to a rival. I've had nightmares about this scene.

The kingpin is Adán Barrera, heir to a Mexico-based international drug syndicate and a main character in Winslow's 2005 novel, The Power of the Dog, which documented the birth of the Drug Enforcement Administration and its much-maligned war on drugs. In The Cartel, the hefty sequel that came out in June, Winslow revisits that war and America's role in it, while Barrera revives his longtime enmity with DEA maverick Art Keller —the so-called "Border Lord"—and everyone from local dope boys to corrupt police officers to prostitutes-turned-traffickers gets caught up in their blood feud, or killed. Often both.

In the past 25 years, Winslow has written more than a dozen novels, many of them also focused on California, Mexico and the drug trade. The SoCal native specializes in thrillers whose breezy pacing and casual language belie the seriousness of their subject matter. In 1997's The Death and Life of Bobby Z, a hapless prisoner is asked by the DEA to infiltrate the compound of a deceased drug lord with whom he happens to share a resemblance. In 2006's The Winter of Frankie Machine, a retired hit man tries to outrun his mob past and a lengthy list of would-be killers. In 2010's Savages, two best friends and marijuana dealers are recruited by a cartel after their shared girlfriend is kidnapped and held for ransom.

While many of Winslow's novels feature borderline likable, or least humanized, criminals, their humanity is seriously at odds with the serious nature of their crimes, especially when it comes to the drug trade. In Mexico alone, more than 100,000 people have been killed in the drug war; another 20,000 have disappeared. Winslow dedicated The Cartel to journalists who went missing while he was writing it. That 131-person list concludes ominously with: "There are others."

"In the United States, we see these lurid headlines—43 Killed in Mexico; 28 Beheadings—but what we don't see is the background to that, and what we especially don't see is our own role in it," Winslow says. "People blithely refer to 'the Mexican drug problem,' but it's not the Mexican drug problem. It's the American drug problem, the European drug problem."

The Cartel feels like Winslow's magnum opus—more robust, more information-packed, than its predecessors. He says the book is "pretty close to fact," and its frequent pauses in action to outline Mexico's history help put a Scorsese movie plot into a jarringly real context. Barrera is again the inauspicious moneyman-turned-ruthless kingpin, and Keller the morally conflicted DEA renegade—the Captain Ahab to Barrera's white (powder) whale. They are both products of a decades-long American foreign policy that began by bolstering drug lords to fight communism; of corrupt Mexican police and military officials who have made it impossible to truly do battle with the cartels; of governments that would rather fight violence with violence than address the root causes of this high-stakes clusterfuck.

"We're so intent on terrorism right now, which is thousands of miles and whole oceans away," Winslow says. "Meanwhile, a hundred-thousand people have died in one of the bloodiest conflicts in the Western Hemisphere since the American Civil War—and it's right over there. People are dying for our recreation, our addictions. That's the reality."

The Cartel pinpoints what Winslow considers one of America's largest hypocrisies in the war on drugs: our lack of effort to contend with addiction. "In San Diego County, unless you have blue-chip health insurance, there's a two-year waiting list to get treatment," he says. "If you're a meth addict, the odds are, you're not going to make it two years. You're going to die, or commit a crime that puts you behind bars." In an ironic bit of basic economics, Winslow points

out that the cost of drug treatment is just a quarter of the cost of incarceration.

The Cartel illustrates plenty of other hypocrisies: Why do Americans act as though Islamic militants invented the social media behead-and-brag, when the cartels have been doing it for years? Why are we so focused on organic Chipotle burritos and naturally colored Kraft cheese when our pot brownies and coke bumps come at the expense of Mexican lives? Why are we spending billions of dollars fighting marijuana, cocaine and heroin when last year's record number of opiate deaths were tied primarily to prescription painkillers?

"There's never been a war on drugs," says Winslow. "There's been a war on drugs likely to be sold by people of color."

While Winslow never intended to write a sequel to The Power of the Dog—"When it was first broached to me, I think I hung up the phone"—The Cartel feels like a natural and necessary successor. It's a book meant to remind readers that, marijuana legalization efforts aside, the drug war isn't over. We're still fighting the old fights, still engaged in the schizophrenia of spending billions of dollars buying drugs, billions of dollars incarcerating people for using them and billions of dollars trying to keep them out of our country. Dog spanned 1975 to 2005, and The Cartel 2005 to 2015; it seems hard to imagine a world in which 2015 to 2025 won't offer up a logical next chapter in the story of the Mexican cartels and their DEA nemeses (though when I broach the idea of a trilogy, Winslow feigns jumping out a window).

"I'd like to think this is the end of the story, but the drug wars are heating up again," he says. "People go out and buy their weed, and while I don't see anything wrong with the drug itself, I see the way it arrives to us: through murders, through slave labor, through women who have been gang-raped. We don't seem to have a problem purchasing that… but we'll boycott Starbucks."



Radim Beznoska/EPA

GARY SNYDER, 'POET LAUREATE OF OUR CONTINENT,' LIVES IN THE PRESENT

AT 85, THE MULTI-TALENTED PULITZER PRIZE–WINNING POET GARY SNYDER HAS A NEW BOOK AND SHOWS LITTLE SIGN OF SLOWING DOWN.

An odd blend of old and new San Francisco turned out to see Gary Snyder at the Nourse Theater one evening in May. Former counterculture standard-bearers such as

Michael McClure and Peter Coyote mixed with young tattooed hipsters, curious techies and California Governor Jerry Brown. When I pulled out my reporter's notebook, the young Indian man sitting next to me said, "Are we supposed to take notes?"

Wouldn't hurt. Snyder, who turned 85 the week before, is a Pulitzer Prize–winning poet (for the 1975 collection Turtle Island), award-winning essayist, early conservationist, community activist, pioneering bio-regionalist, amateur geologist, avid mountaineer, conscientious omnivore (before the term existed), multi-linguist, Asian art and history expert, Native American story archivist and perhaps the person most responsible for awakening a generation of beatniks and hippies to Buddhism. (A former Zen monk, Snyder translated the ancient Chinese Buddhist poet Han Shan—Cold Mountain Poems—and was the unwitting model for the hero of Jack Kerouac's 1958 novel, The Dharma Bums.) And he shows little sign of slowing. Though he'll later tell the assembled that his new collection, This Present Moment, is "the last book of poems I'll publish," he has a new book with artist Tom Killion (California's Wild Edge: The Coast in Prints, Poetry and History) and is gearing up to finish another based on the history of the environment in China—the kind of thing he makes sound like a little side project, the way you might talk about building a treehouse for the kids.

Will Hearst, grandson of William Randolph Hearst and chairman of the board of the Hearst Corporation, introduces Snyder with colorful details from his formative years. At the age of 7, when Snyder's family was working a small family farm in Washington state, he asked a Sunday school teacher, "Will I meet my heifer in heaven?" When he was told God didn't allow no critters beyond the pearly gates, the boy declared, "Then I don't want to go there." After touching on other detours in his winding path—his stints as a teenage logger, his job as a fire lookout, his co-starring

role in a documentary Hearst produced (The Practice of the Wild) that consisted largely of Snyder and novelist-poet Jim Harrison walking the grounds near Hearst Castle and talking about nature—Hearst introduces him as “the poet laureate of our continent,” and the crowd leaps to its feet.

Up close, Gary Snyder is dynamic and charismatic: sun-weathered face, snow-white hair and beard, squinty blue eyes and the rough hands of a guy who built his own house and climbed Mount St. Helens when he was 15. He looks like the archetypal prospector in a Western film, the one who appears out of nowhere when your party is lost in the desert to tell you just how far off you are before laughing at the burros you’ve burdened with gold and other worthless things.

He was born in San Francisco and as a young boy moved with his family to the Seattle region. His “hardscrabble” farm life there was just part of the Depression, he says. “Everyone was poor, everyone that we knew. My dad was out of work for eight or nine years.… But I never had a consciousness of poverty until later, when I realized there are people who have it a little easier.”

He met some of them when he enrolled at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. “It was the first time I met affluent radicals,” he told fellow alum John Sheehy for an oral history of the school. It was there he made the acquaintance of poets Lew Welch and Philip Whalen, and there that he first encountered Zen Buddhism.

“I’m one of those people in whom the experiential and the intellectual is not clearly divided,” he told Sheehy. “When I first heard about Native American sweat lodges, without even thinking twice about it, I went out and built a sweat lodge and did it.… In the same way, as soon as I read about Buddhism, I sat down and crossed my legs to see how it would work.”

It was later, back in San Francisco (graduate work at the University of California, Berkeley, studying Asian

languages), that a friend took Snyder to a salon hosted by the poet Kenneth Rexroth. “The first time I met Allen Ginsberg was at Rexroth’s house,” he told me. “Allen had just come up from Mexico. The first time I saw Kerouac, Allen brought him to Rexroth’s place.” The Beat novelist was on the verge of great fame; after countless rejections, Viking had just agreed to publish On the Road, his fictionalized account of his travels with Neal Cassady. “Kenneth thought of both Jack and Allen as ‘talented jerks.’”

On October 7, 1955, Snyder was among the readers at what would be remembered as a seminal moment in American culture: the Six Gallery reading where Ginsberg first unleashed “Howl” while a drunken Kerouac chanted “Go, go, go!” from the audience. Less lauded, though almost as influential, was Snyder’s reading of “A Berry Feast,” suburban destruction giving way to the Native American myth of the trickster called Coyote and ancient Indian rituals like the ceremonies celebrating the first fruit of the season ("The Chainsaw falls for boards of pine,/Suburban bedrooms block on block/Will waver with this grain and knot,/The maddening shapes will start and fade/Each morning when Commuters wake").

Snyder’s interest in Buddhism sparked something in Kerouac, who used it to create Japhy Ryder of Dharma Bums. “Jack was a novelist; he wasn’t a journalist,” says Snyder about his relationship to a book that became a cult classic. “I am only one small model for the Japhy Ryder character, and a lot of what he does is fictional. But some of it is interestingly drawn on what we did together; the mountain climbing scene is close. But as a piece of writing goes, it’s not one of my favorite Kerouac novels. It was written too hastily, and you can see the haste. He just banged it together because his publisher said, ‘On the Road is doing so well, let’s have another novel right away.’” Snyder says he was studying in Japan through most of the ’60s and missed much of the cult that formed around the book. “The

Western Buddhist world, however it is, has to live with The Dharma Bums. I don't have to live with it too much."

Peter Coyote, probably best known to filmgoers for his role in ET and to hipsters as a founding member of the Diggers, was influenced by Snyder's example. He came to Zen meditation through him and overcame an addiction to heroin in part with the discipline of Zen. The two became friends, and in his new memoir, The Rainman's Third Cure, Coyote recalls asking Snyder about the self-destructive artists who used Verlaine and Rimbaud as models for their behavior (perhaps without knowing their poetry). Coyote wrote:

"When Verlaine and Rimbaud were young," [Snyder] said, they were protesting the iron-grip bourgeois rationality had on all aspects of nineteenth-century French culture—he manners, the view of reality, and the exclusion of 'the wild' from public life. Rationality in business and society were dominant values. 'Deranging the senses' was one strategy artists like Verlaine and Rimbaud employed to break free of that.

"Today," he continued, "the bourgeoisie is sociopathic, overindulged, distracted, spoiled beyond measure, and unable to restrain its gluttony, even in the face of pending planetary destruction. In the face of such a threat, it has, by necessity, become the responsibility of the artist to model health and sanity."

Beat poet Jack Spicer nicknamed Snyder "The Boy Scout," and he should be on the short list of poets you want with you when get lost in the woods. Snyder resists the handle "nature poet" as the "kiss of death," he said in a New Yorker profile. Nature for him is not something to be contemplated: It is the thing itself, and our divorce from it has been our undoing. In 1969 he wrote and freely circulated an environmental jeremiad entitled "Four Changes" that warned of the dangers of overpopulation, pollution and a

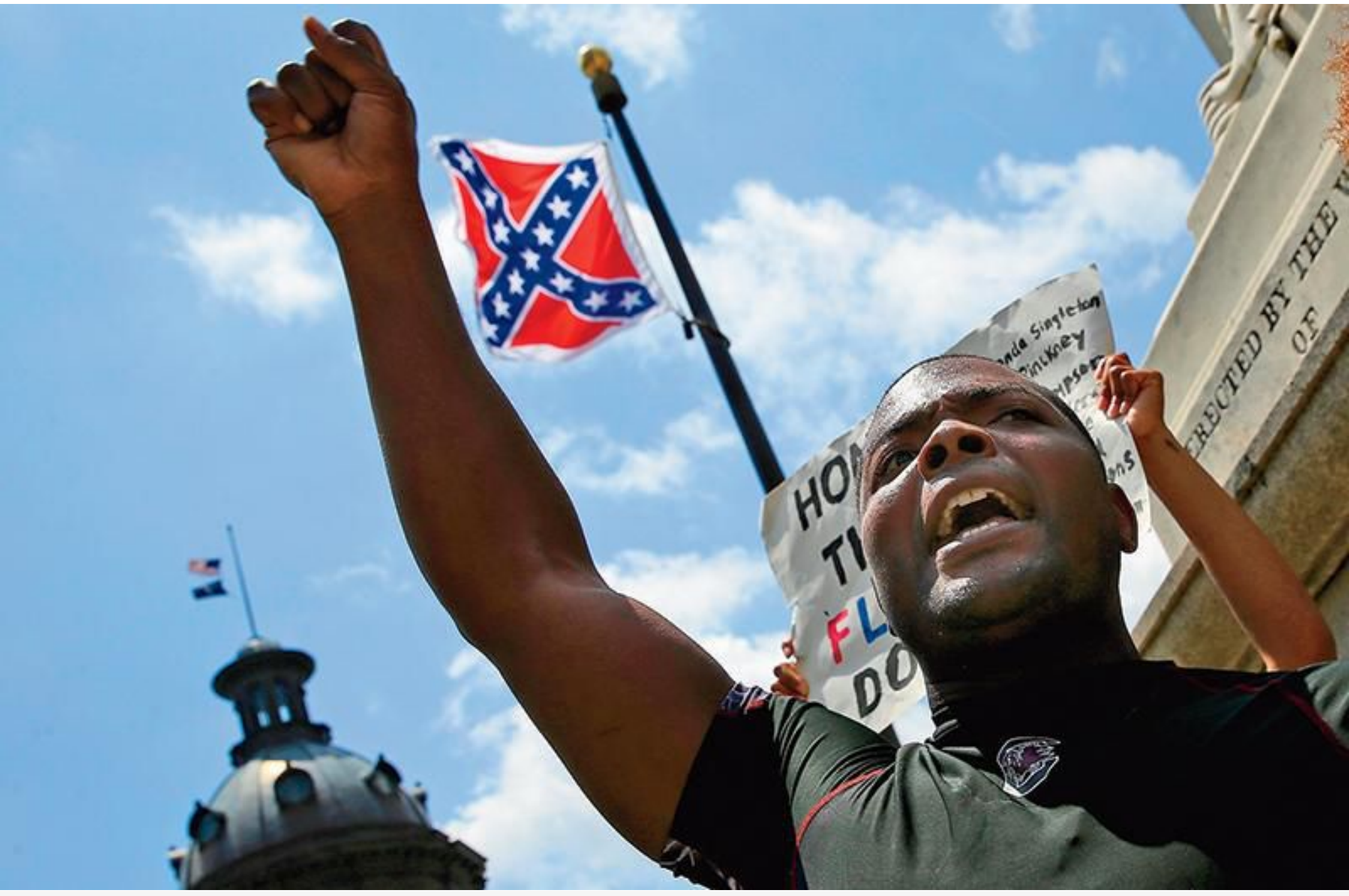
dependence on fossil fuels. Makes you think that fire lookout job he had with the U.S. Forest Service was a metaphor.

Dressed in an orange shirt, wearing wooden beads and red socks (he heard that the pope stopped wearing them and figured, “Somebody’s got to”), Snyder reads randomly through his latest collection. He says, “I’m not sure I like it myself” (though later he'll tell me, “Its strength is that I let it be imperfect”).The poems borrow from Greek myth (“Anger, Cattle and Achilles”), 13th-century Chinese painting (“Mu Ch’i’s Persimmons”) and his life in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada (“Log Truck on the 80”). He does not read the collection’s final, difficult poem about the death and cremation of his second wife (“Go Now”) but is engaged, friendly and, well, present when he fields questions from the audience. There are some head-scratchers, but Snyder manages to craft an interesting answer to even incomprehensible queries (this is a man who took a year and a half to answer a Zen koan, after all). To the inevitable question about writing, he says, “I’m of the school of poetry that never does anything intentionally.… I like to wait until it insists to be written.”

01

CAPTURE THE FLAG

Columbia, South Carolina—Five days after the slaughter of nine worshippers at a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina, Governor Nikki Haley called for the removal of the Confederate flag from the state Capitol, and the state Legislature is expected to discuss the issue. Photos of the accused gunman, Dylann Roof, holding a Confederate flag fueled a national campaign to ban the flag. In a eulogy for the pastor killed in the massacre, President Barack Obama said the Confederate flag was a reminder of “systemic oppression and racial subjugation.”



Win McNamee/Getty

02

THE MARRYING KIND

New York—New York City's Pride March on June 28, two days after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of gay marriage, was a particularly raucous affair. Hundreds of thousands of people filled the streets in New York, San Francisco and other cities to celebrate. The Obama administration joined the celebrations by lighting up the White House in rainbow colors, while Republican presidential hopefuls rushed to condemn the decision.



Jewel Samad/AFP/Getty

03

DEBTORS' PRISM

Athens—The government of Greece closed banks and restricted withdrawals from ATMs after the collapse of talks with its international lenders regarding the mountain of debt Athens is struggling to pay down. Elected on a platform of ending austerity measures demanded by the European Union and other lenders, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras finds himself under pressure from lenders to impose further cuts in return for continued financial support. He called for a July 5 referendum on whether to accept a deal.



Alkis Konstantinidis/Reuters

04

TOURIST TRAP

Sousse, Tunisia—A man lays flowers June 28 on the beach where tourists were shot dead in front of the Hotel Imperial Marhaba. Saif Rezgui, a 24-year-old Tunisian student, killed at least 38 people, mostly British and other European tourists. Dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, the attacker pulled out a Kalashnikov rifle he had hidden in a beach umbrella and opened fire on the beach before pursuing foreigners to the hotel's pool. He was eventually shot dead by police outside the hotel. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.



Andreas Gebert/picture-alliance/dpa/AP